$4.00

Mindfuckers

A Source Book on the Rise of Acid Fascism in America
Including material on Charles Manson, Mel Lyman, Victor Baranco and their followers by David Felton, Robin Green and David Dalton

Edited and with an Introduction by David Felton



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Wind fuckers

To my Followers

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Wind
fuckers

Introduction: Humiliation and Control

I've got no strings, so I have fun,
I'm not tied up to anyone,
How I love my liberty,
There are no strings on me.

—"I've Got No Strings" by Ned Washington,
Leigh Harline from Walt Disney's Pinocchio,
copyright 1940 by Bourne, Inc.

The publisher, a skinny, high-voltage man with nervous ideals, has insisted that, for God's sake, whatever else I may cover in the introduction, please explain and "legitimize" that terrible word, *Mindfuckers.*

Of course, we professional writers know there are no such things as illegitimate words, only illegitimate writers. Why Americans still allow their language to be throttled by a tiny, illiterate band of puritans, papists, vice officers and petrified media executives is below our comprehension.

But the publisher wants it stressed that words like "mindfuckers" and "mindfucking" are, after all, used openly and respectably today in such disciplines as psychiatry and group therapy. Which is true. For example, Dr. Frederick S. "Fritz" Perls, the Gestalt pioneer, used "mindfucking" the same way he used "verbiage production" or "sentence ping-pong" or, for that matter, "bullshit."

All of which, I'm afraid, has nothing to do with the word as it applies to the title of this book. Charles Manson, Victor Baranco and Mel Lyman, the super-heroes in the following stories are mind-fuckers simply because they've made it their business to fuck men's

minds and to control them. They've succeeded by assuming god-like authority and using such mindfucking techniques as physical and verbal bullying, group humiliation and, in the cases of Manson and Lyman, the chemical alteration of brain cells.

Which takes us to the book's subtitle and a potentially much more controversial term: acid fascism. I'm not entirely satisfied with the phrase—perhaps "post-acid fascism" would be more accurate although it sounds yucky—but it has two useful implications:

First, as a kind of historical label, it refers to the host of rigid, teacher-oriented communities—both Jesus and non-Jesus—that have sprouted across the land with the drug revolution of the sixties. The Children of God, the Church of the Final Judgement (the Process), the Erica Foundation of Oscar Ichazo, and the three communities reported in this book are some of the better known ones, but who knows how many others there are? This new personal fascism is unique, occurring as it does during the greatest period of moral and personal liberation in the nation's history. It has split young self-realizers into two camps—a kind of Drug Left and Drug Right—and reportedly has created deep rifts in such growth centers as Esalen in Big Sur, California.

But the term "acid fascism" has a second implication, the notion that for some people psychedelics create or deepen a spiritual hunger. Does acid lead to harder stuff—like Manson or Lyman?

The young Americans who grew up in the sixties were the first to experience psychedelics, the first to experience a euphoric—if temporary—heaven on earth unknown to any previous generation. We're not talking about a few freaks and losers, now, we're talking about a huge portion of people—millions. For this reason alone they are a different breed. Television, the war, might have affected them more deeply, but the drugs affected them *differently*, in ways we may not see for some time, let alone understand.

Just after the story of Mel Lyman's Fort Hill Community appeared in *Rolling Stone*, we received a rather perceptive letter from David R. Williams of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who wrote:

"Lyman is a threat; but he is also the symptom of a far greater disease, the hushing up and blatant sidestepping by heads of a frank discussion of all the terrifying aspects of dropping acid. Many of Lyman's followers are like thousands of us who have experienced the profoundest anxieties, loneliness, and fear while tripping. But when searching around for someone with whom to communicate the gripping paranoia of those fears, found only silence, smugness, and pretended ignorance. So they found Mel, who did speak the truth about it, but who took that truth and those fears, and twisted them and used them to humiliate and control.

"Fascist communities like Fort Hill are bound to spread and the power of the Mansons and Lymans among us to strengthen, just as long as people continue searching their fears, on acid or straight, and no one else is there to talk to them straight and direct and sympathetically about it."

This book draws no conclusions as to the causes and influence of acid fascism; it's too early to tell. But the similarities between the followers of Manson, Baranco and Lyman, and between them and us, raise some very real questions and fears about the future: that something dark may indeed lurk beyond the Aquarian Age.

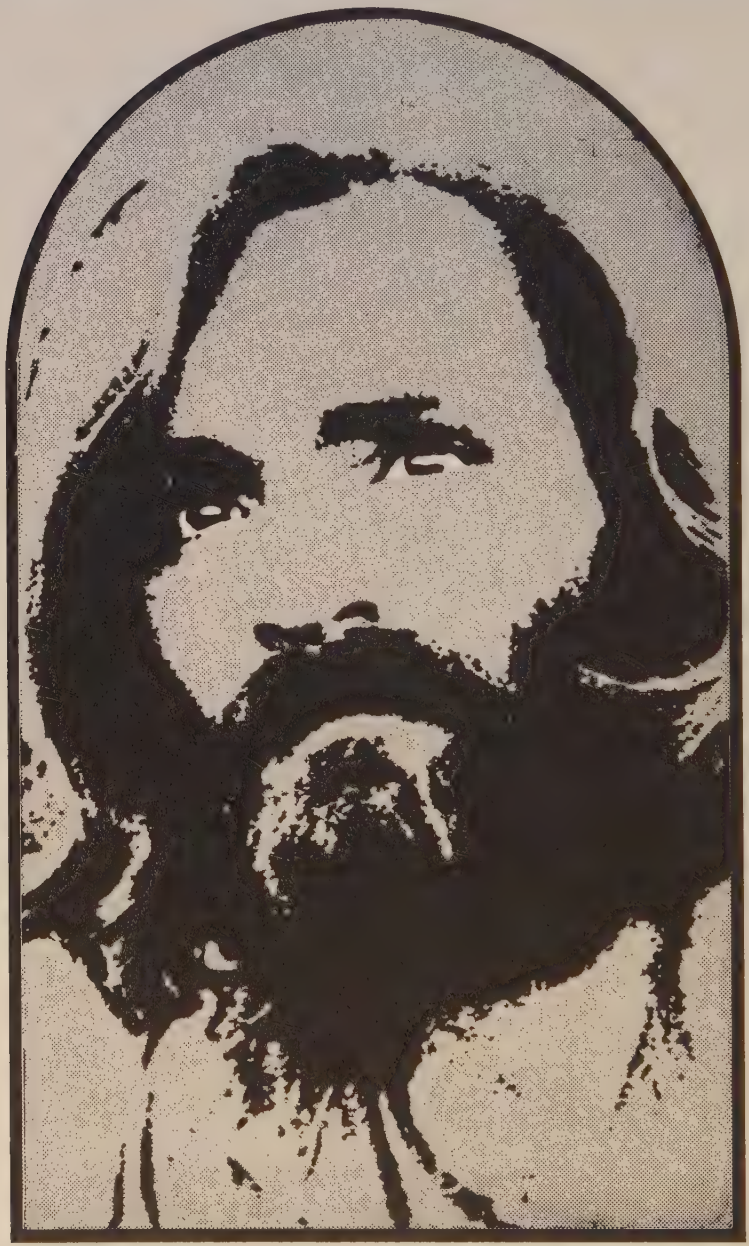
As Mel Lyman wrote in his "Plea for Courage":

"We've got to stop fighting each other and fight the common enemy. We've got to get all these little communities into one Big Community."

—David Felton
May, 1972

Images of innocence charge him to go on
But the decadence of history is looking for a pawn
To a nightmare of knowledge he opens up the gate
A blinding revelation is served upon his plate
That beneath the greatest love is a hurricane of hate.

—"Crucifixion" by Phil Ochs.



Year of the Fork, Night of the Hunter

By David Felton and David Dalton


SCHED. COMP. EARLY 1970
Veterans Hospital
Oat Mountain El. 3328
Mission Point El. 2711
Dexter Park
San Fernando Airport
San Fernando
San Fernando Mission
Movie Location Ranches
Devonshire
SAN FERNANDO VALLEY
Vet. (405) Hosp.
San Fernando Valley State College
Van Nuys Airport
Victory Vanowen Park
Roscoe Park
Lankershim Blvd.
Hollywood Burbank Airport
Los Angeles Valley
W. Pierce Jr. Coll.
Pasedo Park
VENTURA
Ventura
Los Encinos St. Mon.
FREWY
Forest Lawn Mem. Park
Griffith Park
San Vicente Mtn. El. 1963
LOS ANGELES
Topanga
BEVERLY HILLS
WEST HOLLYWOOD
Hollywood Bowl
Mt. St. Mary College
U. C. L. A.
L. A. Co Art Mus.
La Brea Fossil Pit
Will Rogers Park
Pacific Coast
SANTA MON. MONICA
Castle Rock Bay Club
Bel Air
Will Rogers Beach
SANTA MONICA
Santa Monica Beach
Pacific Ocean Park
Venice City Beach
CULVER CITY
Windsor Hills
Ladera Hills
Centinela
Loyola Univ.
Manchester
Hollywood Turf Club Race Track
INGLEWOOD
L. A. International Airport
Dockweiler Beach
City Beach
Lennox

Part I
Stomping Ground

Three young girls dance down the hallway of the Superior Court Building in Los Angeles, holding hands and singing one of Charlie's songs. They might be on their way to a birthday party in their short, crisp cotton dresses, but actually they are attending a preliminary hearing to a murder trial.

A middle-aged lady in Bel Air wants to "mother" Charlie, and two little girls send a letter to him in jail:

"At first we thought you were guilty. But then we read in the papers about these kids who were stabbed to death in the same way as the Sharon Tate murders. We knew you hadn't done it because you were in jail at the time. We knew you hadn't done it anyway when we saw your face in the newspaper. . . Love . ."

Charlie gets letters from little girls every day. They come from New Hampshire, Minnesota, Los Angeles. A convicted bank robber who met Charlie in jail writes "The Gospel According to Pawnee Fred, the Thief on the Other Cross," in which he asks:

"Is Manson Son of Man?"

Thirty miles northwest of the courthouse, seven miles due north of Leonard Nimoy's Pet Pad in Chatsworth (Supplies—Fish—Domestics—Exotics), a circle of rustic women at the Spahn Movie Ranch weave their own hair into an elaborate rainbow vest for Charlie.

Most of them are early members of Charlie's three-year-old family. There's Lynne Fromme—they call her Squeaky—Sandra Good, Gypsy, Brenda, Sue, Cappy, Jeany.

"We've been working on this vest for two years," says Sandra, "adding things, sewing on patches. It's for Charlie to wear in court." And Squeaky adds, "Wouldn't it be beautiful to have a photograph of Charlie wearing it? And all of us standing around close to him, hugging him like we used to?"

Wouldn't it be beautiful to have the others standing around too, the rest of the family, the others imprisoned? Tex Watson and Patty Krenwinkel and Linda Kasabian and, oh yeah, the snitch, Sadie Glutz. Her real name is Susan Atkins, but the family calls her Sadie Glutz because that's what Charlie named her.

Meanwhile Charlie sits blissfully in his cell at the Los Angeles County Jail, composing songs, converting fellow inmates to his gospel of love and Christian submission, and occasionally entertaining a disturbing thought: Why haven't they gotten in touch? A simple phone call would do it. Surely they've received the telegrams, the letters. Surely they realize that he knows, he *understands* their glorious revelation; that he understands the whole double album.

Everywhere there's lots of piggies
Living piggy lives
You can see them out for dinner
With their piggy wives
Clutching forks and knives to eat their bacon.

Ten blocks from the new County Jail stands the old County Hall of Justice, a grotesque, brown brick fortress that for decades has guarded the Los Angeles Civic Center from aesthetic inroads. The entire sixth floor belongs to the District Attorney and his staff, a member of which, now alone on his lunch hour, unlocks a file cabinet and withdraws several neatly bound, family-type photo albums. Slowly he turns each page, studies each snapshot, each personality:

Sharon Tate, considered one of Hollywood's prettier, more popular promising young stars, wife of genius film sorcerer Roman Polanski. After her biggest film, *Valley of the Dolls*, she retreated to private life to enjoy her first pregnancy. The photographs show her in her eighth month.

Jay Sebring, the handsome young hair stylist who revolutionized the fashion industry by introducing hair styling to men, convincing them—despite early masculine scoffs—there was something better looking than a 15-minute union trim even if you had to pay ten times the price. He once was Miss Tate's fiance.

Wocjech Frykowski, Polanski's boyhood pal who came to Hollywood with hopes of directing films himself. His luck at this was dismal, and even Polanski later admitted he had little talent. Instead, he began directing home movies inside his head, investing heavily in many forms of exotic dope.

Abigail Folger, heiress to the Folger's Coffee millions, an attractive Radcliffe girl considered by neighbors to be the most charming of the Polanskis' house guests. She met Frykowski in New York and became his lover.

Steven Parent, an 18-year-old from the Los Angeles suburb of El Monte, a friend of Polanski's caretaker, unknown to the others, a nobody like the rest of us.

Leno La Bianca, owner of a grocery store chain, and his wife, Rosemary, an ordinary couple of the upper middle class, fond of such quiet pleasures as boating, water skiing and watching late night television in their pajamas. They knew nothing of Sharon Tate and her friends, living miles away in different neighborhoods and different worlds.

Gary Hinman, music teacher, bagpipe player, and onetime friend of Charlie Manson's. He once, in fact, gave the Manson family his Toyota, although the circumstances surrounding that gift have since come into question.

The snapshots are homey little numbers, color polaroids taken by staff photographers from the County Coroner's office and the Los Angeles Police Department. They show all the wounds, the nakedness, the blood. Sometimes the exposure is a little off, but the relevant details are there—shots of the rooms, the bullet holes, the blood on the furniture and floors, the bizarre blood writing on the walls, words like RISE and HELTER SKELTER and PIGGIES.

And shots of the weapons found at the scene—ropes, pillowcases, forks and knives.

After replacing the albums, the D.A. investigator continues eating his lunch and now starts perusing an official looking 34-page document. It is an interview with Mary Brunner, a former member of Manson's family, conducted by detectives last December:

Q. Mary, did you ever see Charlie Manson or Bruce Davis hit Gary Hinman?

A. No.

Q. Do you know how he got the slash on the side of his face that severed his ear?

A. He got it from one of those two, he had to.

Q. Now, after everybody left on Sunday, did anybody ever go back to the house?

A. Yes.

Q. Who?

A. Bobby.

Q. Was anybody with Bobby?

A. Not that I know of. He told me about it and he talked like he was alone.

Q. What did Bobby tell you he went back to the house for?

A. He tried to erase that paw print on the wall.

Q. And how many days later did he go back to the house?

A. Two or three days after Sunday, Tuesday or Wednesday.

Q. All right. Did he describe to you what the house looked like or smelled like or anything like that?

A. He told me it smelled terrible. He could hear the maggots.

Q. Hear the maggots? What?

A. In Gary, eating Gary.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add about this that we haven't covered?

A. There isn't anything else to it.



Los Angeles is the third largest city in America, according to population, but easily the largest according to raw real estate. It is bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the south and southwest, by Ventura County to the west, by the San Gabriel Mountains and fire-prone Angeles National Forest to the north and by scores of cruddy, smoggy little towns and cities to the east.

Its shape resembles some discarded prehistoric prototype for a central nervous system, the brain including the entire San Fernando Valley, the San Gabriel foothills, West Los Angeles, Venice, portions of the Santa Monica Mountains, Hollywood, Hollywood Hills and Highland Park—actually hundreds and hundreds of square miles—with a weird, narrow spinal chord extending from the Civic Center, through the country's largest black ghetto, to San Pedro Harbor 25 miles away.

Charles Manson knew his city well. Like many Los Angeles residents he learned to drive long distances regularly without a second thought. During his two years as a free man in Southern California he frequently "made the rounds," visiting friends, keeping business appointments, preaching to small groups, giving and taking material possessions.

For some reason, perhaps for no reason, many of the spots where he stopped or stayed are located on the extreme periphery of the brain of Los Angeles. Which at least makes it an easy, scenic drive—Sunday afternoon with the wife and kids. Who knows? Ten years from now these spots may be official points of interest, stations of the cross as it were. Save these handy directions for your personal map to the homes of the stars.

Starting at the Spahn Movie Ranch in the extreme northwestern corner of Los Angeles, drive two miles east on Santa Susana Pass Road to Topanga Canyon Boulevard. Now turn directly south for 15 miles or so, crossing the floor of the San Fernando Valley and heading into the heart of Topanga Canyon itself.

It was here that Manson and his family first lived after arriving from the Haight-Ashbury in late 1967, and it was here that Manson first met Gary Hinman. Hinman's house is a little further down

the road, almost where Topanga Canyon meets the beach at Pacific Coast Highway.

You can't see into the house now, of course, because the cops boarded it up last July after they found Hinman's body perforated with stab wounds. They say he was tortured for 48 hours. On a nearby wall they found the words POLITICAL PIGGIES and a neat little cat's paw print in blood. Bobby Beausoleil, an electric guitarist and member of Manson's family, has already been sentenced to death, and Manson and Susan Atkins are awaiting trial in the matter.

After driving on to Pacific Coast Highway, take a left, and after two miles, take another left. Now you're on Sunset Boulevard, winding through wealthy Pacific Palisades where, for a short time in early 1968, the Manson family lived with Beach Boy Dennis Wilson. Wilson doesn't live there anymore, however; he moved shortly after Manson allegedly threatened him with a bullet.

Keep driving east on Sunset for another eight or ten miles past Brentwood Heights, past Mandeville Canyon, over the San Diego Freeway, past UCLA and Bel Air and Beverly Glen. And when you reach the center of Beverly Hills, turn left on Canon and head north into Benedict Canyon.

Now here you may need a more detailed map because the streets get pretty tricky with all the turns and culs-de-sac. But up in Benedict Canyon there's this little dirt road, Cielo Drive, which dead ends at the old, rambling, hillside house where producer Terry Melcher, Doris Day's son, used to live. Manson paid several business calls on him there, but the business was never completed before Melcher moved out early last summer.

Neighbors hardly had had a chance to meet the new residents when, on the bright Saturday morning of last August 9th, Mrs. Winifred Chapman, a maid, ran screaming from the house, across the huge grounds and parking lot, through the iron gate and down the road:

"There's bodies and blood all over the place!"

Not a bad description. Police found Steven Parent just inside

the gate, shot five times in his white Rambler, the wheels of the car already turned toward the road in a desperate attempt to escape. Wocjech Frykowski's body lay in front of the house, shot and stabbed and stabbed again and again. Twenty yards down the rolling lawn, underneath a fir tree, they found Abigail Folger dead and curled up in a bloody nightgown.

Inside the house Jay Sebring and Sharon Tate lay stabbed to death near the living room couch. They were connected by a single nylon cord wrapped around their necks and thrown over a rafter. Sebring was also shot and his head covered with a pillowcase. On the front door police found the word PIG written in blood with a towel.

If the gate's locked, you won't be able to see the house because it's set back some from the road. But anyway, that's where it is.

Now make a U and head back down to Sunset. Continue east for another 10 miles, along the famous and more and more plastic Sunset Strip, past the tall, swanky office monuments to Hollywood flackery, past the decaying radio empires of the Forties, clear to Western Avenue, where you take a left.

A mile north, Western turns right and becomes Los Feliz Boulevard, cutting east through the wealthy, residential Los Feliz District that skirts the foothills of Griffith Park. After about three miles, just before Los Feliz crosses the Golden State Freeway, drive into the winding, hillside streets to your right, where you'll find Waverly Drive.

In August, 1968, Manson and his family started visiting Harold True, a UCLA student who lived with some other guys on Waverly. They were all good friends, and the family just liked to go up there and hang around and smoke dope and sing and shoot the shit. True later moved to Van Nuys, where he presently lives with Phil Kaufman, a former member of the family who produced Manson's record.

True's neighbors, incidentally, were Leno and Rosemary La Bianca who, a year later on the morning of August 10th, were found stabbed—or rather carved—to death inside their home. The words

DEATH TO PIGS, HELTER SKELTER and RISE were written, again in blood, on the kitchen walls. And someone had etched WAR on Leno La Bianca's stomach with a fork.

Anyway, those are just some of the spots Manson liked to visit on his frequent tours of the big city. Cut back to Los Feliz, head north on the Golden State Freeway for 18 miles, cut west across the north end of the Valley on Devonshire Street—another 10 miles—turn right on Topanga Canyon Boulevard, and you're practically back at the Spahn ranch.

The whole round trip is eighty miles or so. That may seem like a big distance, but actually the roads are good and it shouldn't take longer than two or three hours, especially if you take it on a Sunday afternoon or, say, late at night.

Perhaps no two recent events have so revealed the cut-rate value of public morality and private life as the killing of Sharon Tate and the arrest of Charles Manson. Many were quick to criticize The Los Angeles Times for publishing bright and early one Sunday morning the grisly (and since recanted) confession of Susan Atkins. Any doubts about Manson's power to cloud men's minds were buried that morning between Dick Tracy and one of the world's great real estate sections. Sexie Sadie laid it down for all to see.

Critics accused the Times of paying a healthy sum to promoter Larry Schiller, who had obtained the confession from Miss Atkins' attorneys in return for a cut of the profits. The Times responded publicly with silence, privately with a denial. No money was paid, said the editors. Schiller had sold the story to various European Sunday editions, they said, and an eight-hour time difference allowed the Times to pick it up from one of their European correspondents. In other words, "If we hadn't run it here, some other paper would have." (Some other paper, in fact many other papers, did run it, of course, with the excuse the Times had done it first.)

The Times response sounded like a hype from the start. For one thing their Sunday edition is put to bed, not a mere eight hours before Sunday morning, but late Friday night so their vast, hair-curlered, beer-bellied Supermarket weekend readership can

get its comics and classified ads a day early. Also, why was Schiller himself seen hanging around the Times' offices as the edition rolled off the presses?

ROLLING STONE has since learned that the Times explanation was at least partly correct. No money was paid, that's true, or at least not much. Because, dig, the Times people didn't buy the confession, they *wrote* it. Word for word. Not only the confession but the book that followed, *The Killing of Sharon Tate*, with "eight pages of photographs," published by New American Library, a Times-Mirror subsidiary.

In the volume, Schiller gratefully acknowledges "the invaluable aid of two journalists who worked with the author in preparing this book and the original interviews with Susan Atkins."

Those two journalists, it turns out, were Jerry Cohen and Dial Torgerson, both veteran members of the Times rewrite crew. Torgerson wrote the first chapter to the book, and Cohen, an old friend of Schiller's, wrote the confession and the rest of the book. Both subsequently have reported much of the news related to the case, and Cohen has been assigned to cover Charlie's trial.

According to a freelance Life contributor in the area and since confirmed by several Times staffers, Miss Atkins' attorneys gave Schiller tapes of her confession on the condition that he sell the story to foreign papers only and split the money. But Schiller is a promoter, not a writer, and he needed someone to put the thing together fast.

After conferences with Cohen and various Times editors, it was decided Cohen and Torgerson would write a story and a book, both under Schiller's name. In return, New American would have exclusive rights to the book and the Times would publish the confession simultaneously with the foreign press.

All this was to be top secret, of course. But Schiller got careless. Not only did he awkwardly appear in the Times city room to see his freshly printed byline, he invited people like our Life correspondent over to his house the week before while Cohen was in the next room hacking away.

What possible justification could the Times editors have had in running the confessions? Where were their heads? Can an individual's right to a fair trial, free of damaging pretrial publicity, be so relative? Can it be compromised so easily by the dubious right of the public to be entertained?

The Times would argue that Susan Atkins' testimony to the County Grand Jury, later made public, had essentially the same impact as her confession. If so, why did the Times print both? Besides, there surely are many readers who trust in the Times who rightfully suspect the Grand Jury, realizing it consists mainly of retired old men and white, upper-middle-class housewives hand-picked by the District Attorney.

If Miss Atkins' confession does not constitute damaging pretrial publicity, what does? What does the phrase mean?

Clearly Charles Manson already stands as the villain of our time, the symbol of animalism and evil. Lee Harvey Oswald? Sirhan Sirhan? Adolph Eichmann? Misguided souls, sure, but as far as we know they never took LSD or fucked more than one woman at a time.

Manson is already so hated by the public that all attempts so far to exploit his reputation have failed miserably. Of the 2,000 albums of his music that were pressed, less than 300 have sold.

A skin flick based weakly on popular assumptions about Manson and his family, *Love in the Commune*, closed after two days in San Francisco, only mustered two old men on a Saturday night in Los Angeles. Normally, one wouldn't expect skin flick buffs to be that discriminating, although certainly the few scenes in the film of a Manson-type balling a headless chicken probably had little mass prurient appeal.

Even Cohen and Torgerson's book is reportedly in financial trouble, although profits to the Times-Mirror Syndicate from sales to other American papers have already been counted.

Are there 12 people in the country, let alone Los Angeles, who can honestly say they have no opinions about Charles Manson? Mention of his name in polite conversation provokes, not words

or heated argument, but noises, guttural sound effects, gasps, shrieks, violent physical gestures of repulsion. He is more than a villain, he is a leper.

Shortly after Manson's arrest, the president of the musicians' local in Los Angeles wrote the Times and said flatly that he had checked his union's records and that Manson definitely was not a musician. So there'd be no confusion, he added that most musicians were good clean fellows who believe in hard work and the American way of life.

Members of the Los Angeles Criminal Bar Association reduced Manson to the butt of a sick song-and-dance spoof during their 17th Annual Installation Banquet. Entitled "One Manson's Family—the family that slays together, stays together," the amateurish skit was performed before most of the city's criminal court judges, including Superior Judge William B. Keene, the man scheduled to preside at Manson's trial. According to the Times, Judge Keene "appeared to enjoy the skit."

But all this is really beside the point. Even if the Times could somehow prove that its confession did Manson absolutely no harm, what right did they have to take the risk? The moral decision must be made before, not after, the fact if a man's right to an impartial trial is to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, the most blatant—if less damaging—assault on the concept of pretrial impartiality comes not from the Establishment or the Far Right, but the Far Left, the Weatherman faction of the SDS.

According to an item from the Liberation News Service, the Weathermen have made Manson a revolutionary hero on the assumption that he is guilty. Praising him for having offed some "rich honky pigs," they offer us a prize example of bumper sticker mentality:

"MANSON POWER—THE YEAR OF THE FORK!"

The underground press in general has assumed kind of a paranoid-schizo attitude toward Manson, undoubtedly hypersensitive to the relentless gloating of the cops who, after a five-year-search,

finally found a longhaired devil you could love to hate.

Starting in mid-January, the Los Angeles Free Press banner headlined Manson stories for three weeks in a row: "MANSON CAN GO FREE!" "M.D. ON MANSON'S SEX LIFE!" "MANSON INTERVIEW! EXCLUSIVE! EXCLUSIVE!"

The interview, by the way, ran for two more weeks, consisted mainly of attorney/author Michael Hannon talking to himself. Later, the Free Press began a weekly column by Manson written from jail.

About the same time, a rival underground paper, Tuesday's Child, ran Manson's picture across the entire front page with the headline "MAN OF THE YEAR: CHARLES MANSON." In case you missed the point, in their next issue they covered the front page with a cartoon of Manson on the cross. The plaque nailed above his head read simply "HIPPIE."

When the Manson record was released, both papers agreed to run free ads for it, but the chain of Free Press bookstores, owned by Free Press publisher Art Kunkin, refused to sell it, arguing it was an attempt to make profit of tragedy.

Of course, not all the stories in the Free Press and Tuesday's Child were pro-Manson. Some were very lukewarm, others were simply anti-cop. The question that seemed to split underground editorial minds more than any other was simply: Is Manson a hippie or isn't he?



It's hard to imagine a better setting for Manson's vision of the Apocalypse, his black revolution, than Los Angeles, a city so large and cumbersome it defies the common senses, deifies the absurd. For thousands of amateur prophets it provides a virtual Easter egg hunt of spooky truths.

Its climate and latitude are identical to Jerusalem. It easily leads the country in our race toward ecological doom. It has no sense of the past; the San Andreas Fault separates it from the rest of the continent by a million years.

If Manson's racial views seem incredibly naive, which they are (after preaching against the Black Panthers for two years, he recently asked who Huey Newton was), they are similar to views held by hundreds of thousands of others in that city and that city's Mayor. Citizens there last year returned to office Mayor Sam Yorty whose administration was riddled with conflicts of interest and bribery convictions, rather than elect a thoughtful, soft-spoken, middle-of-the-road ex-cop who happened to be black. Full-page newspaper ads, sponsored by a police organization, pictured the man as a wild African savage and asked voters, "Will Your Home be Safe with Bradley as Mayor?"

The question to ask, therefore, maybe not now but five or ten years from now, is this: Who would the voters prefer, Bradley or Manson? Would Your Home be Safe with Manson as Mayor?

"I am just a mirror," Manson says over and over. "Anything you see in me is you." He says it so often it becomes an evasive action. I'm rubber and you're glue. But there's a truth there nonetheless.

The society may be disgusted and horrified by Charles Manson, but it is the society's perverted system of penal "rehabilitation," its lusts for vengeance and cruelty, that created him.

The Spahn Movie Ranch may seem a miserable place for kids to live, with its filthy, broken-down shacks and stagnant streams filled daily with shoveled horseshit. Life there may seem degenerate, a dozen or more people eating garbage, sleeping, balling and raising babies in a 20-foot trailer.

But for more than two years most of those kids have preferred that way of life—life with Charlie—than living in the homes of their parents.

The press likes to put the Manson family in quotation marks—"family." But it's a real family, with real feelings of devotion, loyalty and disappointment. For Manson and all the others it's the only family they've ever had.

Is Manson a hippie? One is tempted to say that Manson spent 22 of his 35 years in prison, that he is more a product of the

penal system than the Haight-Ashbury.

But it cannot be dismissed that easily. Charles Manson raises some very serious questions about our culture, whether he is entirely part of it or not.

For actually we are not yet a culture at all, but a sort of pre-culture, a gathering of disenchanted seekers, an ovum unfertilized. There is no new morality, as Time and Life would have us believe, but a growing awareness that the old morality has not been practiced for some time.

The right to smoke dope, to pursue different goals, to be free of social and economic oppression, the right to live in peace and equity with our brothers—this is Founding Fathers stuff.

In the meantime we must suffer the void, waiting for the subversives in power to die, waiting for the old, dead, amoral culture to be buried. For many, particularly the younger among us, the wait—the weight—is extremely frustrating, even unbearable. Life becomes absurd beyond enjoyment. Real doubts grow daily whether any of the tools we have to change power still work.

Into this void, this seemingly endless river of shit, on top of it, if you will, rode Charlie Manson in the fall of 1967, full of charm and truth and gentle goodness, like Robert Mitchum's psychopathic preacher in *Night of the Hunter* with LOVE and HATE inscribed on opposing hands. (A friend of Manson's said recently, "You almost could see the devil and angel in him fighting it out, and I guess the devil finally won.")

This smiling, dancing music man offered a refreshing short cut, a genuine and revolutionary new morality that redefines or rather eliminates the historic boundaries between life and death.

Behind Manson's attitude toward death is the ancient mystical belief that we are all part of one body—an integral tenet of Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity as expressed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians: "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ."

But Manson adds a new twist; he wants us to take the idea

literally, temporally. He believes that he—and all human beings—are God and the Devil at the same time, that all human beings are part of each other, that human life has no individual value. If you kill a human being, you're just killing part of yourself; it has no meaning. "Death is psychosomatic," says Manson.

Thus the foundation of all historic moral concepts is nearly discarded. Manson's is a morality of amorality. "If God is One, what is bad?" he asks. Manson represents a frightening new phenomenon, the acid-ripped street fighter, erasing the barrier between the two outlaw cultures—the head and the hood—described by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test:*

"The Angels were too freaking real. Outlaws? They were outlaws by choice, from the word go, all the way out in Edge City. Further! The hip world, the vast majority of acid heads, were still playing the eternal charade of the middle class intellectuals—Behold my wings! Freedom! Flight! —but you don't actually expect me to jump off that cliff, do you?"

Perhaps it was inevitable for someone like Manson to come along who *would* jump off that cliff; that a number of lost children seem willing to believe him is indeed a disturbing sign of the times.

"Little children," wrote St. John in a prophetic letter, "it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrists shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time."



Part II
Porfiry's Complaint

Jack Webb couldn't have cast him better. Trim, dark-haired, maybe in his early forties, he looks not like a cop but a no-nonsense college dean. California suntanned, New York tough talker. Movements precise and full of energy. Nothing wasted; zero defects, zero limp wrists. Neatness counts. Blue Sears shirt rolled to the elbows, he carefully clears his desk for lunch, consisting today of one dietetic Sunkist grapefruit placed properly atop its brown paper bag.

Suddenly his thick fingers plunge into the fruit as if it were an orange, ripping off the skin and exposing the virgin sections to the heavy, worldly air of the Los Angeles County Hall of Justice. As he talks, he devours the sections one by one, biting them in two like mice, the juice dripping from his mouth, down his fingers, onto the paper bag.

He is, in fact, a prosecutor. That is to say, he works in the District Attorney's office, investigates crimes, prepares cases and occasionally appears in court. For our purposes, he probably knows as much about Charles Manson's past three years as any member of the Establishment after the facts after the fact. He agreed to speak only if his name would not be revealed. So we give him another name, a prosecutor from another time, Porfiry.

The case against Manson, then, told in Porfiry's own words, with grapefruit and relish:

Now in order to fully understand the thing and give an accurate picture to your readers, you have to start with Gary Hinman. Now

Gary Hinman's murder took place around July 25th. Gary Hinman was a musician, as you know. He played several instruments. He was quite good, I understand, and worked quite a bit. He had these two automobiles. A Toyota and another car.

Anyway, Bobby Beausoleil is charged with his murder. He's already had a trial in Santa Monica and that trial ended in a hung jury.* During that trial Danny DeCarlo testified, and Danny DeCarlo testified for us at the Grand Jury hearing.

Now, Danny DeCarlo is a member of a motorcycle gang, Straight Satans. He used to live out at the ranch 'cause he used to get free pussy. Broke up with his wife. They used to take care of his baby.

He used to admit. He'd say, this is the greatest thing next to mother's milk. They'd bring you food, make love to you any time you could. It's very interesting, though, he didn't believe this philosophy about the end of the world coming up.

Manson, you see, had this crazy philosophy that the world was coming to an end, or at least there would be a revolution, and he wanted a place in the desert, which he'd already picked out.

Manson used to keep DeCarlo around because DeCarlo was the leader of his gang, and in case Manson ever needed any physical protection, there weren't enough men around there to give him protection. He had all these guns up there at the Spahn Ranch, a machine gun and a lot of other guns, but he needed someone like DeCarlo who knew something about guns to keep them in good condition and supply the manpower. So he let DeCarlo stay around there.

DeCarlo testified at the first Hinman trial that it was Manson who sent Beausoleil out to Hinman's house with these two girls, Mary Brunner and Susan Atkins. They got out there, they asked him for his money. He said, "I don't have any money. The only thing I have are these two cars." And he signed over the cars.

See, this was another thing Manson used to use. If you ever

*Since Porfiry's interview, Beausoleil has been retried in Los Angeles, found guilty and sentenced to death. Manson now faces more first degree murder charges in the slaying of Hinman.

talk to Dennis Wilson, he'll tell you that. What's yours is mine. You take my pen. I'll take your pen. You take my guitar, I'll take your guitar. Because material things don't mean anything. He took a lot of things on the pretext: "What does it mean? It doesn't mean anything."

So Hinman says he doesn't have the money. So then they had one of the girls hold a gun on Hinman while Beausoleil was looking for the money. Somehow or other Hinman was able to get up. The girls didn't shoot him. Beausoleil comes back and starts pistol whipping Hinman with the gun. During the pistol whipping, the gun goes off. The bullet was recovered.

Now, at the first trial we didn't have that gun. Since the first trial, we have found the gun. That gun has been traced to Manson. They know who he purchased it from, so it has been traced.

Now a fingerprint of Beausoleil was found in Hinman's residence. August 6th, Beausoleil was arrested driving Hinman's Toyota up in San Luis Obispo.

When he's arrested, he gives a real cock and bull story about Black Panthers killing Hinman, and that he got there when Hinman was dying, and he asked him to take his car and gave him the car keys, signed over the keys. The knife that was used to kill Hinman was found in the back seat of the Toyota that he was driving.

Now, knives are not like guns. All you can say is that a knife similar to the one used was found. With a gun, you can say, balistically speaking, this gun fired this bullet.

With a knife [*Here Porfiry takes a small paring knife from his desk, stabs a piece of grapefruit rind several times and examines the wounds*] you can only say that it was three centimeters long, it's got a sharp edge and a dull edge, and so forth.

Anyway, and the timing here is very significant, August 6th he's arrested in San Luis Obispo. August 7th Beausoleil is returned to L.A. County, and he puts in a phone call in at the ranch telling them that he was arrested there and telling them he hasn't said anything.

Now—this is only a supposition on my part, I don't have any proof to support it—I suppose he, meaning Manson, said to himself, "How am I going to help my friend Beausoleil out? By showing that the actual murderer of Hinman is still at large. So I know that Melcher used to live in this house on Cielo Drive.

"Go out there, Watson, with these girls and commit robbery and kill anyone that you see there.

"Don't forget to leave—" and this is very important because in the Hinman case they wrote POLITICAL PIGGIES in blood. He said—"Don't forget to leave a sign."

So after the killings were all over, Susan Atkins goes back and writes the word PIG on the door. This is the same door where Watson's fingerprint was found. And on the back door is where Krenwinkel's fingerprint was found. And that also has the blood of Abigail Folger.

Oh, I was telling you about Linda Kasabian. She is a true flower child. She came out here from New Hampshire to meet her husband, Bob Kasabian, July 1st, 1969, and when she and he had a falling out, she ended up at the ranch.

When she saw the way Manson had beaten these girls, she wanted out. We have witnesses' statements of where he was beating these girls up, and unfortunately she didn't get out in time. She was in on the Tate charge.

As a result of her not going in the house, we don't have her fingerprints like we do with Krenwinkel and Watson. She didn't kill anybody. She threw away the three sets of clothes not her own.

Channel 7 found the three sets of clothes which have been traced to the three sets of clothes that Gypsy bought. They have blood on the clothes that fit the victims. The police didn't find the clothes, so you can't say it was manufactured.

Channel 7, in going over Susan Atkins' story in the Times, said to themselves, "Jesus, if I had committed this murder, I'd want to pull off the first wide space in the road and throw these bloody clothes away."

And that's exactly what they did. About two miles up Benedict Canyon they found the clothes on the side of a hill.

The night the killing occurred, they stopped and washed their hands off with a hose at a man's house on Portola Drive. This man should have reported to the police the next day when he heard about the killings, which were just a mile from him, but he says to his wife, "They didn't steal anything from me, they're just a bunch of hippies. Okay, so they lied; they said they were walking past," and he took the license number of the car.

He talked to his neighbors about it. So he just didn't make it up out of thin air after he heard Susan Atkins. And Susan Atkins testified to that to the Grand Jury about stopping off someplace, and sure enough the witness appears.

He took the license number down which belonged to the car they were using. There were only two cars at the ranch that were operable. There was a bakery truck, Danny DeCarlo's bakery truck, that Manson drove.

You see, Manson has an alibi right up until August 7th, 'cause he met this girl, Mary Brunner, and drove with her from Big Sur all the way down to Oceanside. And they made gas purchases on these stolen credit cards all the way down the line.

And lo and behold, August 7th he's given a traffic citation in Oceanside, driving this bakery truck. But Mary got arrested in San Fernando on August 8th, and when she got arrested forging these credit cards, she was driving this bakery truck. If the bakery truck came back, we can therefore assume Manson came back.

Mary, by the way, is a college graduate, a librarian, Manson's first patsy, so to speak. He met her up in Haight-Asbury, turned her into nothing but a thief. She wasn't a thief before. She used to get money from her parents, things like that, but *he* turned her into a thief.

She used to go out with these phony credit cards, which they stole, and sign other people's names and get things. So, it's not true they only went behind Safeway markets and other markets and got stuff they were throwing out. They did do that. In fact,

they once did that with a Rolls Royce, I understand.

Now Sandra Good was along when Mary was arrested. She wasn't charged because she didn't actually sign any of the credit cards, so she was let go after a few days. So we know Sandra Good wasn't along on the Sharon Tate deal, and we know Mary wasn't along because they were in custody all this time.

Anyway, Watson and the others get back to the ranch, and they hear about it on TV and radio the next day. And the same night Manson goes out, and he wants to shock the world even more.

They were supposed to make two killings on the night of La Bianca; not two people, but two separate incidents. They only killed the La Biancas. And on La Bianca's stomach someone wrote the word WAR with either a knife or a fork.

Why did they pick out La Bianca? There's a fella by the name of Harold True, and this fits in with your LSD acid bit. In August, '68, Harold lived next door to La Bianca. They had gone over there and had pot parties and LSD parties.

Harold True was supposed to go into the Peace Corps, a college boy at UCLA and so on. He moved out at the end of the year, and his two friends kept on living there. The Manson family kept coming there all the time, but finally everyone moved out of there, and the house was vacant at the time the La Biancas were killed.

So after circling the city for a while, they go into the True residence. No one is home, so they go next door. Manson goes in himself, according to Susan Atkins' testimony.

On La Bianca, I'll rap with you on the level, our case is not that strong. There are no fingerprints, no one saw them. All we're depending on is the testimony of Susan Atkins, up till now. If she doesn't testify, which she says now she isn't going to, then Linda Kasabian corroborates that.

Now, why do we believe her? Why do we believe Linda? If she were going to lie, she'd say that Manson killed him. She'd say that Steve Grogan—that's Clem Tufts—actually killed the people, that they went inside.

But she says no, there were seven in this car. The three that

went in were Krenwinkel, Watson, and Van Houten. The next day Krenwinkel came back and told Susan Atkins what went on inside, and only someone who had been to that house could have said what happened.

It was never published in the papers that they left the fork sticking the fella's stomach. It was never published that they left the knife sticking in his neck. It was never published that pillowcases were put over their heads. It was never published in the paper what they wrote on the wall.

They wrote the words RISE and HELTER SKELTER. They wrote DEATH TO THE PIGS. Patricia just went crazy writing all these things. According to her statement to Susan, she wrote all these things.

Manson's a very funny fellow. He lets these three people off, and then he lets them get back to the ranch by themselves. We're trying to find the person who picked them up. There was one car who picked up these three hitchhikers, and it seems to me he should remember it because they were dressed in this black clothing and it was late at night.

So somebody picked up these two girls and Charles Watson in the vicinity of Griffith Park and drove them all the way out to the vicinity of Spahn's ranch. They didn't want to tell him where they lived. But he was someone who lived in that vicinity, maybe Simi Valley or Santa Susana Pass, because he said to them, "Are you going to the Spahn ranch?" and they said no. Like a girl who didn't want her parents to see who she was going out with, they asked to be let off about a quarter of a mile from the ranch and they walked the rest of the way. And this guy has never come forward in spite of the fact that the story had been somewhat written up in the newspapers.

They got back to the ranch, they talk among themselves, not to these other girls or fellas. DeCarlo hears it because he's living there at the ranch.

August 15th, DeCarlo's men come up to the ranch to bring him back to them. They think he's been kidnapped and held there

against his will, and they were going to bust the place up that night. They didn't give a shit about these girls; they wanted Danny back. And he talked them out of it. He says, "No, I'll leave tomorrow."

August 16th, the sheriff's arrested everybody at the ranch on charges of grand theft of automobiles, because there were about six stolen cars out there including this Ford automobile, the one they used for Tate and La Bianca. But because this man never reported the license number, nobody knew it.

The reason they thought the car was stolen—the truth was it wasn't stolen, it belonged to one of the ranch hands—but it had a license plate on it from a later model car. I think it was a '59 Ford they used; well, it had a license plate from a '63 car, and this fella said instead of trying to get new plates, he used to just switch his plates back and forth. Whichever car was in operable condition, he'd put the plates on, but he owned both cars.

He himself was arrested, this fella, and when they cleared up that that car wasn't stolen, they released him, but he never had enough money to go down to the impound garage and get the car out. They never knew that it was the car that was used. They had cleaned up the car quite well, and there is only one light trace of blood in the front section of the car; and it's so slight they can't tell whether it's human blood or not, and naturally they can't tell the type.

In the meantime Linda Kasabian borrows another ranch hand's car and drives down to New Mexico, leaving her child Tanya there. Also, Watson was not there on August 16th when the raid occurred. He had gone up to Death Valley in the meantime.

The police can only hold you for 48 hours and charges have to be filed or the case dismissed. Seeing as they couldn't connect any of the defendants with any of the stolen cars, and they couldn't connect any of the defendants with the submachine gun, everybody was released.

After they were released they all went up to Inyo County. And now it comes up to where we started to get some breaks. They

had checked out every darn theory under the sun, and they just didn't come up with anything.

They get up to Inyo County, and they're living up there. Here's the first reports by the sheriff's office up there.

By the way, under our rules of discovery, the defendants get to see all of these police reports. We can't hide anything from them. They can make independent tests of the fingerprints if they want to, they can make independent tests of the blood. They don't have to take our word for it.

Porfiry opens a brown manila folder, holds it like a hymnal and starts to read.

"The start of the incident of Death Valley occurred on September 19th, 1969, when the National Park Rangers of the Death Valley Monument became aware that persons unknown had set fire to a Michigan Loader." This is a great big tractor. "Tire tracks from this area were of the type used on a Toyota four-wheel drive. Near the cabin they found a '69 Ford automobile, license plate SDZ976."

Porfiry explains: This had been rented from Hertz by one of the girls who is loose now, Nancy Pittman, and she did it on a stolen credit card, a Mobile Oil credit card that had been taken in a burglary on September 7th. On September 7th Nancy Pittman was here in Los Angeles, and we also know that on that date Leslie Van Houten bought a knife with the same stolen credit card. This evidence has not come out but the defense knows all about it.

Porfiry reads: "On September 22nd, Park Ranger Richard Powell entered the Hall Canyon area while investigating the arson case and made contact with a red Toyota four-wheel drive and four female and one male subjects. The conversation of these subjects disclosed very little. The Toyota was using California commercial license plates so and so, registered to Gail Beausoleil, wife of Robert Beausoleil, who's presently held on a charge of murder in Los Angeles County. This is going back to September 19th, September 22nd."

Porfiry explains: This was Hinman's Toyota, and they found it up there.

Porfiry reads: "On September 24th the officers returned to Hall Canyon. The vehicles and the subjects were gone. The miners in the area stated that the subjects pulled out about four hours after Ranger Powell left. On September 29th C.H.P. Officer James Purcell accompanied Ranger Powell to check out two dwellings. At one location, Barker Ranch, they discovered two females about 19 years of age. They were uncommunicative, but did state that the person who lived there had gone to town and would be back later.

"Purcell and Powell contacted two men driving a truck loaded with automotive supplies. They advised the officers that members of a hippie-type group owned the supplies they were transporting, and that they were afraid for their lives if they failed to cooperate with this hippie group. They related to the officers that they used drugs, had sex orgies and attempted to recreate the days of Rommel and the desert corps by driving across the country night and day in numerous dune buggies. The leader of the cult, who called himself Jesus Christ, was attempting to set up a large group of hippies in the area.

"After leaving the Barker Ranch the officers located a group of seven females, between the ages of 18 and 20, all nude or partially so, hiding in the brush in one of the small draws off the main road to the rear of the ranch. Going further up the same draw, they encountered one male individual and saw a second run from the area. In this camp was a red Toyota with a certain license number. The license plate noted earlier was no longer on this vehicle. With the Toyota was a dune buggy with a certain number. Ten to 29 checks disclosed that the Toyota was a Los Angeles Police Department stolen.

"On approximately September 29th officers contacted the Sergeant of the Lone Pine Regiment Post and advised him of the circumstances. They found a lot of stolen cars up there. The officers converged on the Barker Ranch, arrested five female subjects, located and arrested five female subjects on the dugout. All prisoners were escorted to the ranch and transported to Independence. A .22-caliber pistol was found in the camp.

"Prior to the officers entering this area it was established that this same group was arrested in Chatsworth by Los Angeles Sheriff's Department on August 16th, 1969, and had been armed with submachine guns. In an earlier conversation with the miners in the area it was disclosed that these people had talked of having machine guns.

"Armed with this knowledge, officers requested permission to carry high-powered rifles. No shots were fired. All but two or three of the female suspects were armed with belt type knives. No attempt was made on their part to use these weapons. Total arrests: 10 females, three males.

"Two 17-year-old females stepped from the brush and surrendered to the officers. These two girls said that they were in fear of their lives and trying to escape from the hippie group. Both stated that Charles Manson, who was not in custody as of that time, would kill or seriously injure them if he caught them trying to leave. They recovered the cars, contacted the parents of subject Kathleen Lutesinger. They were advised that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office was seeking this subject as a material witness to a murder that occurred earlier this year in the Topanga Canyon area. Contact was made with homicide detective Gunther Whitely, who left Los Angeles same morning enroute to Independence for questioning. Interrogation of the subject Lutesinger by the Los Angeles Sheriff's office disclosed that three of the female prisoners held at the Inyo County Jail were involved in Los Angeles Sheriff's office Topanga Canyon murder. All three were returned to the Los Angeles County jail by Los Angeles Sheriff's office.

"On October 9th 1969, Officer Purcell and National Park Service rangers reentered Death Valley, made contact with additional witnesses, who advised them that a rental truck loaded with supplies had become stuck and abandoned on the road to Barker Ranch. Officer Purcell made contact with Sgt. Haley at Lone Pine and attempted to locate and arrest the ring leader Charles Manson, who was still at large. Additional male suspects were there also. Successful contact was made at the ranch, and the following were

taken into custody: Charles Manson, Kenneth Brown, David Hammock, Lawrence Bailey, Bruce Davis. Also arrested in the area was Diane Bluestein, Sherry Andrews, Patty Sue Jardin, Sue Martel.

Porfiry shuts the folder.

There's an interesting sidelight to this investigation in Inyo County. The C.H.P. recovered in Death Valley a vehicle traced to a Philip Tenerelli. This guy had been listed as a missing person by the Culver City Police Department. The Bishop Police Department had reported a suicide October 2nd, 1969. The first thing they know is the guy's name is John Doe. Bishop is right up by Death Valley.

When they found Tenerelli's car down this cliff, they went back and rechecked the identify of the fingerprints, and they found the suicide of October 2nd was this fella Tenerelli that was listed missing in Culver City. Inyo County is not so sure that the suicide was not a murder.

Because we have a case here in Venice of a guy who calls himself Christopher Jesus or Zero. He's one of the people arrested with Manson in Death Valley. He's one of the people that Manson confided in.

One day his girlfriend, Linda Baldwin, who's also the girlfriend of every other guy in the group, reports to the Venice Police Department that Christopher Zero killed himself, that he was playing Russian Roulette right in front of her eyes, and the gun went off and killed him. It's very difficult to disprove this, but we're not so sure this wasn't a murder to keep him quiet.

But in this trial we're not going to introduce any evidence about Tenerelli or Christopher Zero or the missing body of Shorty Shay, a ranch hand who used to be a stunt man in Hollywood. He was trying to get old man Spahn to order these people off the ranch. After the August 16th raid, when they got out of jail, they came back to Spahn Ranch. And Shorty Shay has never been seen again since that time. Several of the girls say he was cut up in eight or nine pieces and buried on the ranch someplace, but they don't know how it happened.

As a result of this arrest up there, and as a result of this one girl, Lutesinger, talking, they arrest Susan Atkins and put her in the county jail here. Once in the county jail, Susan gets up a relationship with this girl, call her Ronnie Howard. She used the name Nadell, but she was booked under Ronnie Howard. And Susan Atkins, to use the vernacular, *cops out* to Ronnie Howard on how Sharon Tate was killed. Then Susan tells it to another girl, Virginia Graham.

The two girls get together and tell the police about it, and the police come out and interview the two girls separately. And they learn from the girls things that have never been told to anybody before, like the fact that a knife was left at the Tate residence.

She said in her statement to one of the girls, "God damn, I think I even left my knife in there. If the police ever trace that knife to me, I'll be dead."

The next thing that happens is the newspapers, which have been following the case as close as could be, see a great deal of activity occurring. They find out a police officer went to Barker Ranch, and they find out another officer went to Inyo County, and they find out that police officers went out to Spahn's ranch to take pictures. We don't have everybody in custody, because after Patricia Krenwinkel was questioned by the sheriff's office in October, she was released and sent back to Alabama. During the arrest of all these people, Watson gets away. I'm talking about the arrest at Barker Ranch. We didn't even know anything about Linda Kasabian, her name was never mentioned prior to Susan Atkins.

To bring it to a conclusion, the press are going to release the story. The police ask them to hold off for a certain amount of time while they try to get the suspects into custody. When they came over to us, they didn't even have a good fingerprint on Krenwinkel. They had a fingerprint on Watson. They didn't have the gun at that time.

Now we've got the gun that killed Steve Parent and shot Frykowski and Sebring. This gun was identified not only by the bullet, the gun was used to beat Frykowski on the head. The butt had

been broken and the handle was in three pieces. We recovered those three pieces, and they fit perfectly on the gun. This gun has been traced to one that Manson bought, and it's a unique-type gun. It's a long barrel, .22-caliber, Wyatt Earp-type gun. Several witnesses said this was Manson's private gun.

Now, he didn't kill anybody at Tate's. But when you have a conspiracy to commit a crime, and any of the members of the conspiracy do anything else, everyone is responsible for all of the actions of the other. This is the principle we're using against Manson, that he ordered these people killed. Whether he ordered one or five doesn't matter. The fact that they killed five was all within the contemplation of conspiracy.

At first we were thinking of the theory that he had revenge against Terry Melcher, because Melcher put him down. He had Melcher out to the Spahn ranch a couple of times to see if Melcher could sell his music, and Melcher thought it was nothing. So he resented that. He came to see Melcher at the house several times, and he learned the layout of the house.

But then evidence developed that he knew that Melcher moved out during the summer and he was trying to find where Melcher lived. He asked Dennis Wilson several times. I don't think Wilson told him. But I don't think on the night of the killings he thought Melcher still lived there. He just thought that rich people lived there, part of the Establishment, and he had this plan of setting in progress this revolution—blacks against whites.

And he left the sign PIG on the door. Also he had in mind covering up for Beausoleil, who was in custody now. They wanted to commit a murder similar to the Hinman murder to throw the police off the track of Beausoleil as the killer of Hinman.

But unfortunately, although Topanga Canyon is not that far from Benedict Canyon, one is in the county sheriff's territory and one is in the city police territory and they didn't associate the two, even though POLITICAL PIGGIES was written at Hinman's and there were vicious stab wounds and pistol whipping on Hinman.

The Tate killings seemed so senseless because even though money

was taken from one of the victims, money was not taken from all the victims. The house wasn't ransacked. Not that they had valuable belongings there, but they could have taken fur coats and things. On Hinman they took his two cars. The motives appeared different, so they assumed it was different people who committed it, and they didn't connect the word PIG with POLITICAL PIGGIES as being the same group.

The reports that we have from the witnesses show that there were other people that knew about these killings, but they just kept quiet. I don't know why other than the fact that they thought, "Oh hell, there are friends of mine involved, and I don't want to say anything."

This Manson, I'm not going to say that he's got hypnotic powers, but he's got *some* kind of a strength, because he's able to get this girl from Alabama to come out here, and she could have stayed in Alabama another six months, just like Watson did in Texas.

These people believe their leader can do no wrong because he just preached love. And the beatings that were inflicted on those girls, why, that's nothing. That was just another form of life, that's all.

From what we have seen, they were not on LSD at the time of the killings. You just have to say to yourself they were indoctrinated with this kind of thinking.

There was another kid from Texas living at the ranch at the same time and one day after he'd been there about a month, Manson said to him, "That Melcher, he thinks he's pretty hot shit, but he isn't worth a damn. I can kill him just like that. In fact, it would be better if *you* did it. I'll give you $5,000 and a three wheel motorcycle and you leave the ranch right after you do it. Will you do it? And the kid says, "Let me think about it."

A couple of days later he says, "Have you thought about it?" The kid says, "Are you serious?" He says, "Yes, I'm serious." The kid says, "All right, I'll do it." Manson says, "Fine, meet me at such and such a time."

Well, this kid, his mind wasn't blown or anything—he had used

LSD and marijuana—but he immediately called his mother. He says, "Mom, wire me money, I'm coming home." He knew that he was up to his ears in something he just couldn't get out of.

Manson always had a funny way of testing people. These girls went along with him on the murders because he said, "If you really love me, you'll do it. If you really love me, if you love yourself, you'll do these things." And then he could have a hold on them. Because all of the creepy crawlies and burglaries they committed, and we have proof because we have the credit cards they stole and used, were also a buildup for him to get them in his grasp.

Manson in court today put on an act that you would not believe. Threw the Constitution in the trash can. Said to the judge, "I was going to throw it at you, but I didn't want to hit you and I was afraid I'd miss and hit you by accident. But you don't know what the Constitution is. I wish I could throw it at you like you've been throwing things at me."

All he was asking for was a simple answer to whether or not he would agree to the substitution of attorneys for Susan Atkins.

The other day he just played a crazy part. Today he played an angry part. A couple of weeks ago he played a docile part. He's a real good con man, and he was able to get these people to believe in this goddamn philosophy of his. If he really wanted to go ahead and prove his philosophy, he would say, "Judge, this is what I did." But he's smart enough to keep his mouth shut.

Anyone who tries to interview him, he gives them double talk. I talked to Steve Grogan. He could have been indicted. I said, "If Susan wanted to lie, she could have said you went into that house. But she didn't lie. She said you stayed in the car with her. Don't you believe Susan was telling the truth then?"

And he said to me double talk, "It's your truth, not my truth." I said, "Tell me what did happen," and he said,"I don't know." I said, "Weren't you there?" He said, "I don't know."

Porfiry contemptuously reads a newspaper headline: "Manson and Judge Trade Courtroom Pleasantries." That's the kind of con man he is. The only time I talked to him was when I was showing

him some exhibits in the case. He's not stupid. He doesn't have a good formal education, but he's not stupid.



Part III
"So I'm Here for Stolen Dune Buggies"
An Audience with Charles Manson/ AKA Jesus Christ

Moving slowly across the municipal geometry of civic buildings and police offices, a man came towards us looking directly into the sun, his arms stretched out in supplication like the Sierra Indian. From a hundred feet away his eyes were flashing, all two-dimensional boundaries gone. A strange place to be tripping, outside the new, all concrete, Los Angeles County Jail.

"You're from ROLLING STONE," he said.

"How did you know?"

No answer. He led us to the steps of the jail's main entrance, pivoted and again locked his gaze into the sun.

"Spirals," he whispered. "Spirals coming away . . . circles curling out of the sun." His fingers wove patterns in the air. A little sun dance.

"A hole in the fourth dimension," we suggested.

His easy reply: "A hole in all dimensions."

This was Clem, an early member of the family called Manson. Inside was another, Squeaky, a friendly girl with short red hair and freckles. Her eyes, too, were luminous—not tripping, but permanently innocent. Children from the Village of the Damned.

We went to the attorney room window to fill out forms. Two

guards watched from a glass booth above. A surprise; we were not searched. "Step inside the gate," said a disembodied voice. "Keep clear of the gate."

In a minute the gate slid back, and an attorney showed us to a little glass cubicle with a table and three folding chairs—all done in glossy gray institutional paint shimmering under banks of fluorescent light.

While we were waiting, the attorney, who had assisted Manson in preparing his self-defense, talked about conditions in the jail.

"Charlie has been deprived of most of his Constitutional rights.

"After he gave an interview to a San Francisco radio station, they took away his phone privileges. Now he can make three calls a day, but sometimes he has to wait maybe an hour and a half before he can get to a phone. There are four phones for over a hundred *pro pers.*"

(A *pro per* is an inmate who has been allowed to defend himself, a right first granted, but by this time denied Manson. The phrase is a Latin legal term.)

"Then when he does get to the phone, if he gets a wrong number, that counts as one call. They even search him after he finishes his calls. It's unbelievable.

"Then they put him in solitary because he didn't want to go to breakfast. He is allowed to use the law library—it's totally inadequate, of course—but only for an hour at a time, and then they make up some excuse to disturb him.

"The Susan Atkins confession is a perfect example. Here you have the D.A. actively involved in releasing what amounts to the prosecution's whole case to a writer who then syndicates the story internationally. It is really incredible, when you think about it. If this is going to be a fair trial, why are they cooperating with the press to try him in a newspaper? Is it because they really are not sure of their case? I've never heard of this kind of public relations in a murder trial.

"I could go on and on. Messages between Charlie and Susan Atkins are mysteriously lost. Privileges are mysteriously withheld,

and then the orders for them turn out to have been mislaid. It's this kind of manipulation that makes you wonder what is going on here.

"When they booked him in Inyo County, they had him booked as 'Charles Manson AKA Jesus Christ,' and the county sheriffs were running around asking, 'Where's Jesus Christ? We want to crucify him.' "

After nearly an hour, he came in. The guards greeted him, casual, friendly.

"Hi, Charlie, how are you today?"

"Hi, man, I'm doin' fine," he said, smiling.

[*He's wearing prison clothes, blue denim jacket and pants. His hair is very long and bushy, he pushes it out of his face nervously. He looks different, older and stranger than the press photos. His beard has been shaved off recently, and it is growing back black and stubby.*

[*He has a long face with a stubborn jaw, wizened and weathered like the crazy country faces you see in old TVA photographs. A cajun Christ. Little John the Conquerer. He moves springing, light as a coyote.*]

"Can't shake hands," he explained, jumping back. "Against the rules."

[*He unfolds casually in the chair. He is mercurial, he strokes his chin like a wizard trapped under a stone for a thousand years. The Elf King. We ask him about his album. Is he really happy with it?*]

All the good music was stolen. What's there is a couple of years old. I've written hundreds of songs since then. I've been writing a lot while I was in jail.

I never really dug recording, you know, all those things pointing at you. Greg would say, "Come down to the studio, and we'll tape some things," so I went. You get into the studio, you know, and it's hard to sing into microphones. [*He clutches his pencil rigidly, like a mike.*] Giant phallic symbols pointing at you. All my latent tendencies . . . [*He starts laughing and making sucking sounds. He*

is actually blowing the pencil!] My relationship to music is completely subliminal, it just flows through me.

"Ego Is A Too Much Thing," is a strange track. What do you mean by ego?

Ego is the man, the male image.

[*His face tense, his eyes dart and threaten. He clenches his fist, bangs it on the table. He gets completely behind it, acting it out, the veins standing out on his neck, showing what a strain it is to be evil.*]

Ego is the phallic symbol, the helmet, the gun. The man behind the gun, the mind behind the man behind the gun. My philosophy is that ego is the thinking mind. The mind you scheme with, make war with. They shoved all the love in the back, hid it away. Ego is like, "I'm going to war with my ego stick."

[*He waves an imaginary rifle around, then sticks it in his crotch. An M-16 prick.*]

In "Ego" there's this line: "Your heart is a-pumpin' your paranoid's a-jumpin'."

Yeah, well, paranoia is just a kind of awareness, and awareness is just a form of love. Paranoia is the other side of love. Once you give in to paranoia, it ceases to exist. That's why I say submission is a gift, just give in to it, don't resist. It's like saying, "Tie me on the cross!" [*He says this calmly, angelically dropping back in his chair.*] Here, want me to hold the nail? Everything is beautiful if you want to experience it totally.

How does paranoia become awareness?

It's paranoia . . . and it's paranoia . . . and it's paranoia . . . UHN! [*He mimics terror, total paranoia, scrunching up his body into a ball of vibrating fear that suddenly snaps and slumps back in ecstasy.*]

It's like when I went into the courtroom. Everybody in the courtroom wanted to kill me. I saw the hatred in their eyes, and I knew they wanted to kill me. And I asked the sheriffs, "Is somebody going to shoot me?" That's why I feel like I'm already dead. I know it's coming. It's the cops who put that feeling into their heads.

They don't come in with that.

They whisper, so I can hear it, "Sharon Tate's father is in court." And then they go over and shake him down to see if he has a gun, and they're just putting that idea into his head. He has a nice face. I saw him the first day in court. He doesn't want to kill me. They're putting that into his head. You know, they say things like, "We wouldn't want you to shoot the defendant." And every day I see him in court, his face gets a little harder, and one day he's gonna do it.

I know it's coming. They all got their things pointed at me, and they want to use them badly. But actually they can't use them, and that's what makes them so mad. They can't make love with them, they're all suffering from sex paranoia.

They've been following me for three years, trying to find something, and wherever I go there's like thirty women. And that really makes them mad. They can't understand what all these women are doing with one guy.

They're looking for something dirty in everything, and if you're looking for something, you'll find it. You have to put up some kind of face for them and that's the only face they understand.

The answer is to accept the cross. I've accepted it. I can go up on the cross in my imagination. Oh, oooooh, aaaah! [*The orgasmic crucifixion! He gives a long sigh of relief.*

[*Charlie is a super acid rap—symbols, parables, gestures, nothing literal, everything enigmatic, resting nowhere, stopping briefly to overturn an idea, stand it on its head, then exploit the paradox.*]

Have you ever seen the coyote in the desert? [*His head prowls back and forth.*] Watching, tuned in, completely aware. Christ on the cross, the coyote in the desert—it's the same thing, man. The coyote is beautiful. He moves through the desert delicately, aware of everything, looking around. He hears every sound, smells every smell, sees everything that moves. He's always in a state of total paranoia, and total paranoia is total awareness.

You can learn from the coyote just like you can learn from a child. A baby is born into the world in a state of fear. Total paranoia

and awareness. He sees the world with eyes not used yet. As he grows up, his parents lay all this stuff on him. *They* tell *him*, when they should be letting *him* tell *them.* Let little children lead you.

The death trip is something they pick up from their parents, mama and papa. They don't have to die. You can live forever. It's all been put in your head.

They program him by withholding love. They make him into a mechanical toy.

[*He sings from his album, jerking his arms like a spastic Tin Man.*]

I am a mechanical boy,
I am my mother's toy.

Children function on a purely spontaneous level. Their parents make them rigid. You're born with natural instincts and the first thing they want to do is lay all their thoughts on you. By the time you're nine or ten, you're exactly what they want. A free soul trapped in a cage, taught to die.

Everything happened perfectly for me in my life. I picked the right mother, and my father, I picked him too. He was a gas, he cut out early in the game. He didn't want me to get hung up. [*Charlie laughs privately at his private joke.*]

Kids respond to music. They can hear it; they're not so conditioned they can't feel it. Music seldom gets to grownups. It gets through to the young mind that's still open. When your mind is closed, it's closed to God. I look at the world as God's imagination. You are as much Him as you are willing to give up, become part of His body, become one.

The beautiful thing is that it's all there, everything's there in your mind. This kid one time kept asking me to teach him how to play the guitar. I can't teach anything. If you believe you can do it, you can.

I once asked a friend, "Teach me what snow is." He said, "Well, snow is like water, it's cold and . . ." He spent months trying to teach me what snow was and finally he took some frosting out of the icebox. That was the closest he could come. You can't com-

municate with words. Only with actions.

That's what Jesus Christ taught us. Words kill. They've filled every living thing with death. His disciples betrayed Him by writing it down. Once it was written, it was as dead as a tombstone. They didn't live His teachings, they wrote them down. They killed Him with every word in the new Testament. Every word is another nail in the cross, another betrayal disguised as love. Every word is soaked with His blood. He said, "Go, do thou likewise." He didn't say write it down.

The whole fucking system is built on those words—the church, the government, war, the whole death trip. The original sin was to write it down.

Here's one fact that in fact you can't hide: ten thousand people got up on that cross, that Roman cross, to tear the Establishment down from the inside! The preacher hides the ten thousand, crying holy, holy, talking about *one* man, putting up crosses everywhere. It's all hidden under that cross. War, death, all hidden under that lie. Actually, there's no such thing as suffering. That's just another piece of propaganda the church puts out to make you believe the lie.

Can you tell us what you mean by submission? If we are all one, how can you justify being a leader?

There is only One. I'm the One. *Me* is first. I don't care about *you.* I'm not thinking about what other people think, I just do what my soul tells me.

People said I was a leader. Here's the kind of leader I was. I made sure the toilets were clean. I made sure the animals were fed. Any sores on the horses? I'd heal them. Anything need fixing? I'd fix it. I was always the one to do everything nobody else wanted to do. Cats need feeding? I'd feed them. When it was cold, I was always the last one to get a blanket.

Pretty soon I'd be sitting on the porch, and I'd think, "I'll go and do this or that." And one of the girls would say, "No, let me." You've got to give up, lie down and die for other people, then they'll do anything for you. When you are willing to become

a servant for other people, they want to make you a master.

In the end, the girls would be just dying to do something for me. I'd ask one of them to make a shirt for me and she'd be just thrilled because she could do something for me. They'll work 24 hours a day if you give them something to do.

I can get along with girls, they give up easier. I can make love to them. Man has this ego thing [*Charlie stiffens up*] holding on to his prick. I can't make love to that. Girls break down easier. Their defenses come down easier. When you get beyond the ego thing, all you're left with is you; you make love with yourself.

With a girl, you can make love with her until she's exhausted. You can make love with her until she gives up her mind, then you can make love with love.

[*Charlie starts to run his hands up and down his body, caressing himself like a stripper, his fingers tingling like a faith healer in a trance. They dance all over his body.*]

You climax with every move you make, you climax with every step you take. The breath of love you breathe is all you need to believe.

[*Charlie pulls a thousand postures from the air. He squirms, stiffens, anguished with ecstasy.*]

Oooooh, aaaaaaaah, uhhhn! Your beard, it feels sooooo good, mmmmmm! [*His fingers, with half-inch-long nails, fondle his own face, his stubbly chin, impersonating the hands of an unseen lover, making love with himself.*] Your beard feels soooo good, mmmmmmm, yes it does. It all comes from the father into the woman.

[*Suddenly he assumes his teaching position.*]

See, it's because I am a bastard that I can accept the truth. Hell, I am my father! The Father . . . The Son . . . [*He withdraws in mock terror from some imaginary host of accusers, pushing them away, pushing the thought away with extended hands.*] No, no, NO . . . it's not me . . . you've got it all wrong. I'm not—you couldn't think that! I don't know what you're talking about. Listen, I'll get a job.

[*He continues fighting his phantom, Jacob wrestling with his angel, then giggles.*]

See, the cop-out is Christianity. If you believe in Christianity, you don't have to believe in Christ. Get a job and you won't have to think about it all.

The whole thing is set up to get you involved in their game. For instance, I can tell you something about yourself. You don't need those glasses. You're wearing them because you were told you needed them. Your mother told you. Children's eyes, you know, fluctuate between the ages of 12 and 16. So they start saying you need glasses, and pretty soon, after you've been wearing them for a while, you do need them. It's just another gimmick to make money. It's like when someone is dying, they call the doctor in. What do you need a doctor to die for?

George—you know George Spahn? He's not blind. He just talked himself into it. He'd be sitting in front of the television, and his wife would come in and say, "George, you're sitting awfully close to that set. Are you sure your eyes are O.K.?" And he just got to thinking in the back of his mind: "If I were blind, I wouldn't have to get up and go to work every day. I could just sit in my big armchair and let people take care of me." So finally his eyes started to get dimmer, and dimmer, and he finally went blind. But it was his soul who blinded him.

Being in jail protected me in a way from society. I was inside, so I couldn't take part, play the games that society expects you to play. I've been in jail 22 years; the most I was out was maybe six months. I just wasn't contaminated, I kept my innocence.

I got so I actually loved solitary. That was supposed to be punishment. I loved it. There is nothing to do in prison anyway, so all they can get you to do is "Get up! Sit down!" So solitary was great. I began to hear music inside my head. I had concerts inside my cell. When the time came for my release, I didn't want to go. Yeah, man, solitary was beautiful.

What did you mean when you once said God and Satan are the same person?

If God is One, what is bad? Satan is just God's imagination. Everything I've done for these nineteen hundred and seventy years is now in the open. I went into the desert to confess to God about the crime I, you, Man has committed for 2,000 years. And that is why I'm here. As a witness.

I have been avoiding the cross for nineteen hundred and seventy years. Nineteen hundred and seventy nails in the cross. I was meant to go up on the cross willingly.

All the wars, all the deaths, all the hunger of these nineteen hundred and seventy years of blasphemy against Jesus Christ, all the shame and guilt, all the torture, they can't hide it any longer. And unless you are willing to die for your love, you *cannot* love. Jesus Christ died for *your* sins and for *my* sins, and for nineteen hundred and seventy years I have been denying Him.

The white man must pay for the deaths of all the Indians that were slaughtered in greed, and now it is time for *him* to die for *them.*

Hope? You expect hope? [*Charlie puts his hands together in prayer.*] Ah, yes, there must be a little hope left, yes? [*He spits scornfully.*] There's no hope! You make your own world. Hope is the last thing you hang onto. Everyone expects to be saved, saved from their guilt. But they're not going to be saved. I am not going to take responsibility for society.

So I'm here for stolen dune buggies. If it hadn't been that, it would have been something else. They were out to get me, and it was only a matter of time before they found something to pin on me. And they did. First they make the picture and then they fill it in. They create things so they can hide their *own* guilt.

I can only tell you the truth. All my life I've been locked up because nobody wanted me. Jail is where they put people they don't want. They've got nowhere else to go, but no one else wanted them so they got buried alive. They don't want to be there, but everything has to be on its shelf. Everybody's got to be somewhere, and somewhere is where people who are nowhere go.

Do you think you are being persecuted as an individual?

I don't think about myself as an individual. I just think about my love. Every day I love my world a little more. Love makes you stronger. They can't take that away. If a man has given up everything, what can they take away?

Those Christian robes that the judge wears are stained with the blood of millions and millions of lives. Christians have defiled the cross. They wore it into battle. They took Christ into war with them and defiled His image. You know, the cells in this jail are filled with blacks, chicanos, people like me. People who never had anything.

Did you have a bike when you were a kid? I never did. I never had anything. That's what the system is, it's self-recurring. It just goes in circles and circles. Take away the criminal and what have you got? This society needs criminals, they need someone to blame everything on.

What do you feel about Judge Keene taking away your pro per *privilege?*

The judge is just the flip side of the preacher. He took away my *pro per* privilege because they don't want me to speak. They want to shut me up—because they know if I get up on the stand, I am going to blow the whole thing wide open. They don't want to hear it. That's why they assigned me this attorney, Hollopeter.

He came to see me [*Charlie mimics a fussy little man shuffling papers*], sat down and started fiddling with these papers in his briefcase. See, he wouldn't look me in the eye. They sent me this guy who looks like a mouse. He was hiding behind his briefcase and his important papers.

He was saying, "Well, Mr. Manson, in your case, etc., etc." And I said to him, "All right, but can you look me in the eye?" He couldn't look me in the eye.

How can a mouse represent a lion? A man, if he's a man, can only speak for himself. I said to Judge Keene, "Do I speak for you?"

Between you and me, if that judge asks for my life, I'm going to give it to him right there in the courtroom. But first of all he

is going to have to deal with my music, the music in my fingers and my body.

[*Charlie demonstrates. His nails tap out an incredible riff on the table, the chair, the glass of the booth, like the scurrying footsteps of some strung-out rodent.*]

He is going to have to deal with that power. I'm probably one of the most dangerous men in the world if I want to be. But I never wanted to be anything but me. If the judge says death, I am dead. I've always been dead. Death is life.

Anything you see in me is in you. If you want to see a vicious killer, that's who you'll see, do you understand that? If you see me as your brother, that's what I'll be. It all depends on how much love you have. I am you, and when you can admit that, you will be free. I am just a mirror.

Did you see what they did to that guy in the Chicago Seven trial? Hoffman saw in those guys what he wanted to see. That's why he found them guilty. The white man is fading, everybody knows that. The black man will take over, they can't stop it. And they won't be able to stop me either unless they gag me.

Why do you think black people will gain power?

They were the first people to have power. The Pharaohs were black. The Egyptians took one man and raised him up above the rest. They put him on the throne and they fed all these lines of energy into him. [*He folds his arms across his chest like Tutankhamen, holding his pencil between two fingers like Pharaoh's rod.*]

That means power. This represents the penis, the power. They built the pyramids with this energy. They were all one in him. All that concentration created a tremendous force. Love built the pyramids. Focusing all that love on one man was like focusing it on themselves.

Masons have that power. It's a secret that's been handed down since the Pharaohs. The secret wisdom. Jesus knew the symbols. The preacher and the judge got ahold of the symbols and they kept them to themselves.

Judge Keene uses all those symbols. He'll make a sign like "cut

him off." Or like when I get up to speak, he'll make a signal to one of the marshals, and all of a sudden a whole bunch of people will be let in the court and there will be all this confusion so they can't hear what I'm saying. They use all these Masonic signs to hold power over other people.

So I started using the symbols. Every time I go into court, or have my picture taken, I use another Masonic sign. Like the three fingers, two fingers outstretched. When the judge sees it, it really freaks him out because he can't say anything. When I see them making these signs in court I flash them back at them.

They know the symbols of power but they can't understand it. Power without love is aggression. There has been no true love since the Pharaohs. Except for J.C. He knew what love meant.

Tempt me not. Do you remember the story about Jesus on the hill? You know, the devil takes Him to the edge of this cliff [*Charlie leans over the table as if perched precariously on the edge of the void*], and he says to Him, "If you're God, prove it by jumping off the edge." And Jesus says, "There ain't nothing to prove, man." When you doubt, your mind is in two parts. It's divided against itself. See, Christ is saying, "Past get behind me." The devil is in the past. The devil *is* the past. What He is saying is "Don't think." He who thinks is lost, because if you have to think about something, to doubt it, you're lost already.

My philosophy is: Don't think. I don't believe in the mind that you think with and scheme with. I don't believe in words.

If you don't believe in words, why do you use so many of them?

Words are symbols. All I'm doing is jumbling the symbols in your brain. Everything is symbolic. Symbols are just connections in your brain. Even your body is a symbol.

What makes you such a hot lover?

You spend 20 years in jail playing with yourself, a woman becomes almost an unbelievable thing to you. It's like a man in the desert, he's been in the desert for 20 years, and then he comes across a glass of water. How would you treat that glass of water? It would be pretty precious to you, wouldn't it?

How can you love and threaten someone at the same time?

Who did I threaten?

You sent Dennis Wilson a bullet.

I had a pocket full of bullets, so I gave him one.

Then it wasn't given as a threat?

That's his paranoia. His paranoia created the idea that it was a threat. If you gave me a bullet, I'd wear it around my neck to let them see your love for me. The only thing I'd want to do to Dennis is make love to him.

You know, I used to say to him, "Look at this flower, Dennis. Don't you think it's beautiful?" And he would say, "Look, man, I got to go." He was always going somewhere to take care of some big deal. What it amounted to is that he couldn't accept my love. I love him as much as I love myself. I refuse nothing and I ask nothing. It all flows through me.

Can you explain the meaning of Revelations, Chapter 9?

What do you think it means? It's the battle of Armageddon. It's the end of the world. It was the Beatles' "Revolution 9" that turned me on to it. It predicts the overthrow of the Establishment. The pit will be opened, and that's when it will all come down. A third of all mankind will die. The only people who escape will be those who have the seal of God on their foreheads. You know that part, "They will seek death but they will not find it."

How do you know that these things are coming about?

I'm just telling you what my awareness sees. I look into the future like an Indian on a trail. I know what my senses tell me. I can just see it coming, and when it comes I will just say, "Hi there!" [*He says it like a used-car salesman greeting the Apocalypse from a TV screen in some empty room.*]

Why do you think that this revolution predicted in "Revolution 9" will be violent? Why will it be racial?

Have you heard of the Muslims? Have you heard of the Black Panthers? Englishmen, do you remember cutting off the heads of praying Muslims with the cross sewn onto your battledress? Can you imagine it?

Well, imagination is the same as memory. You and all Western Man killed and mutilated them and now they are reincarnated and they are going to repay you. The soul in the white man is lying down. They were praying, kneeling in the temple, They did not want war. And the white man came in the name of Christ and killed them all.

Can you explain the prophecies you found in the Beatles' double album?

[*Charlie starts drawing some lines on the back of a sheet of white paper, three vertical lines and one horizontal line. In the bottom area he writes the word SUB.*]

OK. Give me the names of four songs on the album.

[*We choose "Piggies," "Helter Skelter," "Blackbird," and he adds "Rocky Raccoon." Charlie writes down the titles at the top of each vertical section. Under "Helter Skelter" he draws a zigzag line, under "Blackbird" two strokes, somehow indicating bird sounds. Very strange.*]

This bottom part is the subconscious. At the end of each song there is a little tag piece on it, a couple of notes. Or like in "Piggies" there's "oink, oink, oink." Just these couple of sounds. And all these sounds are repeated in "Revolution 9." Like in "Revolution 9," all these pieces are fitted together and they predict the violent overthrow of the white man. Like you'll hear "oink, oink," and then right after that, machine gun fire. [*He sprays the room with imaginary slugs.*] AK-AK-AK-AK-AK-AK!

Do you really think the Beatles intended to mean that?

I think it's a subconscious thing. I don't know whether they did or not. But it's there. It's an association in the subconscious. This music is bringing on the revolution, the unorganized overthrow of the Establishment. The Beatles know in the sense that the subconscious knows.

What does "Rocky Raccoon" mean, then?

Coon. You know that's a word they use for black people. You know the line, "Gideon checked out and he left it no doubt/to help with good Rocky's revival." Rocky's revival—re-vival. It means

coming back to life. The black man is going to come back into power again. "Gideon checks out" means that it's all written out there in the New Testament, in the Book of Revelations.

The Bible also teaches submission. Women were put here to serve men, but only because they are ten times more receptive, more perceptive, than men. The servant is always wiser than the master.

You know "Cease to Exist." I wrote that for the Beach Boys. They were fighting among themselves, so I wrote that song to bring them together. "Submission is a gift, give it to your brother." Dennis has true soul, but his brothers couldn't accept it. He would go over to Brian's house and put his arms around his brothers, and they would say, "Gee, Dennis, cut it out!" You know, they could not accept it.

Why do you think Susan Atkins gave that confession?

Susan is a very aware girl. I think her soul did it. I think her soul worked on her to the point that she did it. Personally I think she did it to put me in the position I'm in so that people could see where I'm at.

But do you know who is going to be sacrificed? It's her. She is going to change her testimony. She's going to say that she was there, but that I didn't know anything about it. Even if she wasn't there, she is going to say it.

Do you think she was?

No, I don't think she was even there. But she is going to condemn herself out of guilt for what she's done. What she doesn't realize is she couldn't hurt me anyway.

What would you like to do if you are ever released?

If I had a desire, it would be to be free from desire. I would go out into the desert. The desert is magic. I love the desert, it is my home. Nobody ever wanted me and nobody wants the desert. The stone that the builders rejected, do you remember that story?

I'll live in the desert, like a coyote. I know where every waterhole is, and every berry and fruit that's edible. They will come after me in the desert and they will die. The desert is God's kingdom.

Once I was walking in the desert and I had a revelation. I'd walked about 45 miles, and that is a lot of miles to walk in the desert. The sun was beating down on me, and I was afraid because I wasn't willing to accept death. My tongue swoll up and I could hardly breathe.

[*He begins to speak in a gagging fashion, as if he had a huge rock in his mouth. He crashes to the table, his left hand under his head and his right arm stretched out along the table's edge. His face turns rubbery with delirium.*]

I collapsed in the sand. [*Charlie rages like a prospector in a sand storm.*] Oh God! I'm going to die! I'm going to die right here! [*He cries out in a pitiful voice, Peter sinking into the sea.*]

I looked at the ground and I saw this rock out of the corner of my eye. And I remember thinking in this insane way as I looked at it, "Well, this is as good a place as any to die."

And then I started to laugh. I began laughing like an insane man, I was so happy. And when I had snapped to, I realized what I was doing. I'd let go. I wasn't hanging on. I was free from the spell, as free as that stone.

I just got up as if a giant hand had helped me. I got up with ease and I walked another 10 miles and I was out. It's easy.

Do you think you will ever get out of jail?

I don't care. I'm as at home here as anywhere. Anywhere is anywhere you want it to be. It's all the same to me. I'm not afraid of death, so what can they do to me? I don't care what they do. The only thing I care about is my love.

Death is psychosomatic. The gas chamber? [*Charlie laughs.*] My God, are you kidding? It's all verses, all climaxes, all music. Death is permanent solitary confinement and there is nothing I would like more than that.



A bell rang, the jail was closing for the night. Charlie just stood at the entrance to the attorney room, smiling, while outside, in the distance, Clem and Squeaky waved ecstatically at their captured

king, their fingers pressed against the glass. The deputies watched, puzzled, as Charlie flopped his head from one side to the other like a clown. They could not see Clem and Squeaky behind them, imitating his every movement, communicating in their own silent animal language.



Part IV
Super Ego vs. the Id

The forthcoming trial will be the most radical courtroom drama west of Chicago. The prosecution and the defense are in two separate worlds. The megalithic courtroom procedure will grind on and on, and Manson will go on talking about the end of the world. It is unlikely that anyone will ever know what happened on the nights of August 8th and August 9th, let alone in what dimension it took place.

Manson's objection to the trial is that it is arbitrary in selecting him as a scapegoat and irrelevant in that it does not attempt to deal in the absolute terms that *he* has set up.

What he is asking for is patently impossible, and therefore denied the validity of the court. But Manson is not the only person to have called the judicial system into question on grounds that it does not function in the absolute. In fact, Manson's claim against a court that does not operate on cosmic law has been argued since law was first codified, and it is actually on this point that the court is most vulnerable. The court does not pretend to dispense divine law; it claims to operate on a limited, finite system of values; but once you accept the premise, you are obligated to accept a fiction, in terms of justice.

The fiction is in the assigning of guilt to one party, even the isolation of one crime, within a society that perpetuates itself through both mental and physical violence.

Justice could be done only if the jury consisted of everybody in society so the court could expose *all* the connections between

all events simultaneously. Since this is a physical impossibility except through electronic media, the court must proceed as if events took place isolated from the society in which they took place; and once that fiction has been established, it is easy to find villains in individuals.

Our legal system is just what Manson claims—a form of theater in which real victims are found for sacrifice. And since we have allowed our legal system to become theater, we are already in the area of magic.

"Modern legalistic rationalism," as Norman O. Brown pointed out in *Love's Body*, "does not get away from magic: on the contrary it makes all the magical effects so permanent and so pervasive that we do not notice them at all." We are under a spell; the courts, the government have mesmerized us with documents, facts, fetishes to keep our minds off what is really happening.

The reason the present judicial system is so vulnerable to manipulation by freaks like Manson and political radicals is its narrow definition of human activity, the establishing of a single, separate crime in time with a single, obvious motive.

The irony is that as long as the courts persist in dealing with crime as a simple matter, there will be crime. The judicial system actually perpetuates crime because it is incapable of dealing with psychological reality or the true climate of the society.



Charles Hollopeter, after successfully defending a sex criminal virtually convicted by the press in a case most considered hopeless, became Charles Manson's first court-appointed lawyer. Manson recalls that he saw him "briefly," and that Hollopeter, who could not take seriously Manson's desire to act as his own defense, shuffled his documents, mumbled some legal technicalities and asked the court for a psychiatric examination of his client.

Manson could never accept an insanity plea because he does not consider himself insane. Legally, however, it would have been

a simple way out. After all, his alleged crimes are hardly in the realm of sanity.

But Manson insists on defending himself on the grounds that he is quite sane, and it is the court which is not. He is fond of quoting the Chicago 7 trial as an example of the corruption of the legal system, and it is very effective. Manson's condemnation of justice as practiced is obviously accurate in many ways, and it is simply this, his total rejection of the society and its institutions, that has won over the Los Angeles underground press.

As for the plea of insanity that Hollopeter entered, Manson quickly dismissed it as an obvious fallacy. From his point of view, it is a compliment to be considered insane by an Establishment whose self-serving definition of justice is just sordid theater.

And the point is valid. A "mental incompetent" is legally absolved from guilt, but if the argument is carried to its conclusion, there are extenuating circumstances behind *every* crime.

When Karl Marx said, "We are all members of one body," he meant it to be understood psychologically as well as politically. The whole society is a body and specific illnesses are merely symptoms which relate to the whole.

If ever psychoanalysis is admitted to the court, not as hired testimony for the prosecution or the defense, but to examine the court itself as a client, its conclusions are likely to undermine our accepted concept of justice:

"Freud sees the collision between psychoanalysis and our penal institutions: 'It is not psychology that deserves to be laughed at, but the procedure of judicial inquiry.' Reik, in a moment of apocalyptic optimism, declares that 'The enormous importance attached by criminal justice to the deed as such derives from a cultural phase which is approaching its end.' A social order based on the reality principle, a social order which draws the distinction between the wish and the deed, between the criminal and the righteous, is still the kingdom of darkness. It is only as long as a distinction is made between real and imaginary murders that real murders are worth committing: as long as the universal guilt is denied,

there is a need to resort to individual crime, as a form of confession, and as a request for punishment. The strength of sin is the law." (*Love's Body*, Norman O. Brown)

"The strength of sin *is* the law"—Corinthians XV:56. Just as the Courts cannot afford to take the First Amendment to the Constitution seriously, they have never pretended to incorporate Christ's amendment to the Seventh Commandment (adultery): "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Like the Pharisees, in the account of the woman taken in adultery, the court, because it cannot incorporate Christ's teaching, is "convicted by its own conscience." The law, assuming that divine justice will take care of itself, does not concern itself, then, with questions of good and evil. Perhaps its wisdom in restricting its jurisdiction comes from the suspicion that those large cosmic questions are never answered except to the satisfaction of personal prejudice.

In Anthony Burgess' classic novel of mindless violence, *A Clockwork Orange*, his brutish protagonist, Alex, says as much as perhaps can ever be said on the subject: "But, brothers, this biting of their toe-nails over what is the *cause* of badness is what turns me into a laughing malchick. They don't go into what is the cause of *goodness*, so why of the other shop? If lewdies are good that's because they like it, and I wouldn't ever interfere with their pleasures, and so of the other shop. And I was patronizing the other shop. More, badness is of the self, the one, the you or me in our oddy knockies, and that self is made by old Bog or God is his great pride and radosty. But the not-self cannot have the bad, meaning they of the government and the judges and the schools cannot allow the self. And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines? I am serious with you, brothers, over this. But what I do I do because I like to do."



Ironically, after all the judgments have been passed on Manson, the worst the court can do is to send him back to where he is most at home: prison.

Manson has spent 22 of his 35 years in prison, and it neither taught him that crime does not pay, nor convinced him of the righteousness of the society that condemned him. All he learned about was the circular, vengeful logic of crime and punishment: Society locks up criminals because criminals make us lock up ourselves behind our steel frame doors.

Charlie actually looked upon his time in prison as a good thing. He developed a self-taught form of solipsism which let him see the years of captivity as a form of ascetic meditation. Prison was to him an austere form of monastic life and his cell was a Platonic cave where he could project the entire universe. When he finally got out he discovered the world was equally illusory on both sides of the wall, and the grandest illusion was the very concept of inside and outside.

Charlie had come to his own realization that, to the mystic, putting someone in prison as a form of punishment was an incredible irony. It had actually preserved him from the corruption of the world. It's the world that's actually the prison! On the outside, those who thought they were free were actually imprisoned in their games. When he was released, it was like being born at the age of 32. According to Gypsy, one of the more dominant members of the Manson family:

"When he got out, he was brand new. He was like a three-year-old. He was like three years old, he's been on earth three years. You can't lie to him, because he believes all. He looks at it, he doesn't disbelieve it, and he doesn't believe it. He just looks at it . . . He doesn't have all the times mommy said, 'Take your thumb out of your mouth,' in his head. He didn't pay any attention to those things because he wasn't personally involved with them."

His paradoxical brain allowed him to turn everything on its head. Even physical punishment could be interpreted as its opposite by taking Christ's words literally:

"If someone beats you with a whip, and you love the whip, then what's he doing? Making a fool of himself. [*laughs*] Old J.C. said, 'Turn the other cheek.' It's a simple thing, man. [*laughs*] It's

heaven right here, Jack, right here."

"Is that what you did in prison, made it a beautiful place?"

"It always was."

"How did you pass your time away?"

"Time away? Yeah, I guess it was away, far away."

(*from Gary Stromberg's tape of Manson*)

It was in prison, after all, at Terminal Island three years ago, that the strange story of Manson really began, when a fellow convict named Phil Kaufman turned him on to the "music scene," dope, and the "hippie thing" in the world outside.



Part V
The Book of Manson
According to Phil Kaufman

Although Phil Kaufman lived with Charles Manson and his followers for only two months in the spring of 1968, evidence indicates he maintained a steady, businesslike relationship with them in the years that followed. Certainly Kaufman was one of the main advocates of Manson's music and, in fact, claimed to have "discovered" Manson and his talent while imprisoned on drug charges at Terminal Island Federal Correctional Institute in San Pedro, California. It was Kaufman who, after being snubbed by all major recording firms in Hollywood, formed his own company and produced Manson's first album, LIE. Kaufman hoped the record would spread Manson's message to the world. But it turned out to be a financial disaster, considered a kind of poetic justice by those who felt Kaufman was exploiting the Tate-La Bianca murders.*

Little is known of Kaufman himself other than he dabbled in various Hollywood enterprises. He once managed the Flying Burrito Brothers and did some Los Angeles road work for the Stones during their 1969 tour of the United States. He founded Joint Ventures, Inc., a non-profit USO-type operation that booked rock acts into various state prisons.

His account which follows was taken from tapes probably recorded in the early Seventies, before or about the time of Manson's first

*At that time in America, the private possession of certain drugs such as opiates, amphetamines, barbiturates and psychedelics, even marijuana, was considered harmful to society and was forbidden by strict felony decrees.

trial. Kaufman then was living in North Hollywood in an old, rambling shack set back from the road and surrounded by a padlocked wire fence and giant dogs. Maps of the time indicate the house, which occasionally served as an underground railway stop for members of Manson's family visiting the city, was located five miles directly north of Sharon Tate's Benedict Canyon home.

There was this guy playing guitar in the yard one day at Terminal Island. And it was Charlie, singing his ass off. He had an old guitar with all kinds of writing on it, all kinds of songs. And the guards kept taking it away from him, saying, "If you play it in this place at this time, you are violating this rule." They had these rules so you'd continually know that you were captive.

He had done seven and a half years on a ten-year sentence for a $15 postal check, and when he got out I sent him to these people—Gary Stromberg—to record him.

And they did record him. He went in and did three hours of tapes, and they wanted him to do some more but he just split one day. He and the girls. He had a big black bus at the time and they traveled a lot. This was in 1967.

He showed up a year later in another studio, but after he recorded, he split again and never signed anything. We tried to sell Charlie's music a long time ago but we never could get him to sit down and do it. Now, at least, we got him sitting down.

I got out of jail in March, 1968, and joined Charlie a couple of weeks later in Topanga. By that time he had gone to San Francisco and was back.

The family was pretty much the same as now except none of the same guys were there. The original girl was Mary, then Lynne. There was Patty Krenwinkel. Sandy came right after I did in '68. Sandy came with a friend of Charlie's and never went back. The friend went back alone.

There were about 12 girls. Every time Charlie saw a girl he liked, he'd tell someone, "Get that girl." And when they brought her back, Charlie would take her out in the woods and talk to

her for an hour or two. And she would never leave.

During that time, Charlie and the family mastered the art of hanging out. They did chores like collecting day-old bread from the garbage, but that was it.

One day they were at Ralph's Market doing the garbage thing, and the heat was there with the lights on, you know. And the heat said to them, "What you doing there?" And they answered, "We're getting dinner." And the heat said, "Whadya mean you're getting dinner?" And they answered, "This is where we shop, man."

This is the truth. The food that America throws away, they lived on. You can buy day-old bread, but you can't buy bread that's another day old. That includes cookies, chocolate cakes, doughnuts, whatever you have. They have to throw it away.

So the girls went to the garbage dump and took some old vegetables and took all this stuff home and cleaned it and ate it. And they lived on the garbage dumps of America, the food that America's thrown away, for years. And they're still doing it.

But much of the days of Topanga were spent hanging out. You'd spend a lot of days in a bathtub on the front lawn, just sitting there with two naked girls, with the sun beating on you, and you'd get up and turn the bathtub around, follow the sun and smoke some grass. And that was the whole fucking thing.

After a while Charlie became too overbearing for me. You could do whatever you liked, but Charlie would do what was right. Neither of us wanted to give in. For one thing, Charlie just didn't dig outsiders. Not at all. A friend of mine came by one day and Charlie just picked up all the girls and prepared to leave. I asked him what he was doing and he gave me some snappy dialogue, so I said fuck you, I'll see you.

Now when it came time for me to split, Charlie turned to me and said, "All right, take whatever you want." And he wasn't kidding. I could have taken the bus, the motorcycle, 11 girls. That was his philosophy. The more you give, the more you get.

He's gone through thousands of dollars in cars and things and he never keeps anything. Never keeps anything. But he expects

you to do the same. Charlie would go up to someone's house and knock on the door and say, "Can I have your car?" Most people are hostile at first, but he talks to them and gets them together.

Somebody gave him a brand new Mustang two years ago, and there was this woman up in Malibu who at one time was quite affluent. She had stables and a big place to run her horses. But she was unhappy because she could no longer afford these things and was going to lose them. So Charlie gave her the new car, and all the girls went up there and in one week shoveled all the horseshit, all 300 stalls worth. And they got money and paid her, they gave her bread.

Once we were going out to Venice to get a motorcycle a guy was going to give us, and we picked up two kids, a guy and a chick going to Central America. They flashed the peace sign and everything, which, incidentally, Charlie doesn't go for. He doesn't dig holding up the two fingers—just one, standing for ME, The One, all of us are one.

And Charlie asked the kids, "How much money do you have?" And they said, "Not much." And Charlie told them, "Take the car."

That night they stayed at the house, and the next day Charlie asked them again, "How much money do you have?" And they replied, "About $20." And he said, "How are you going to drive the car to Central America on $20? I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you $50 for your car." So they sold him back his car for $50 and hitched to Central America.

That was the same car he later gave to the landlady of this house we were all living in, in Topanga. We had fixed up the house and everybody had a hand in it. One day the landlady came over and just freaked out. She yelled, "Man, what are you doing to my house?" and all that shit. In five minutes she was on the floor, and the girls were peeling grapes for her, and Charlie was singing her songs. And she said, "That's a nice stereo you have there," and when she got in the car she had the stereo. And all the records. This happened in April, '68.

Once George Spahn was at the ranch, man, he needed bread. They gave him $8000 to pay his back taxes, else it would have been snatched from under him. Charlie never keeps anything, that's the thing. Motorcycles, televisions, never keeps anything. I mean, he just keeps it till somebody wants it.

The most shaken I've ever seen Charlie was when they said he couldn't defend himself. It was like they tricked him, they wanted to shut him up. It was a well-calculated plan. They not only gave him a public defender, but they gave him one of the best, which is *bullshit*. They're afraid to hear Charlie talk. He wants justice, he wants to be heard. But justice and the law are not the same thing.

Twice they took Mary's child away. They took Sadie's and they took Linda Kasabian's. Now they're going to give back Linda's and drop all charges against her.

They took Linda to a Chinese dinner. The assistant district attorney took her out of jail last week, took her to the scene of the two alleged crimes and on the way back bought her a Chinese dinner in a restaurant. They're dropping the charges if she gives them information.

Charlie and I have never discussed the case, but I don't think he did it. I don't think the killers are still at large, but I don't think he was in on it.

They say he beat the girls at the ranch. He never beat the girls, that's all in the cops' heads. They don't dig somebody having a good time.

They say he went in and tied up the people at the La Bianca house. That doesn't sound like Charlie. If something like that happened, I don't think he'd like to be present for it.

If Charlie were a murderer, he would have done a lot better job than these people who did the Tate thing. It wasn't done right. It was a straight dumb senseless murder. That's why I don't think he was in on it.

Charlie never took any dope till he got out of prison, and it completely changed his head. He got himself together in jail, and

when he got out, he began practicing it. He is powerful, he is together, and he has a direction. And young people who don't dig the Establishment but don't have an alternative would dig him. He's so together with himself that he projects that. There are no doubts when he talks. He lets you know it, he believes it, and he's practicing it.

Charlie's not going to argue points of law, and that's going to fuck up the court. All the witnesses, all the girls in the family, their value structure is so different from those prosecuting them, that when the prosecution starts asking them about apples, they're going to be answering bananas. When they answer a question, you're not going to be able to tell what the hell they're talking about. Their frame of reference is so esoteric that only they know what they're talking about.

I don't think there are 12 people in the world where Charlie couldn't get to somebody. I don't think there are 12 people in the world who could convict Charles Manson, if Charles Manson is talking for himself.

But it's not getting out of jail that is important to Charlie. It's just taking care of the business that is at hand.

Once when Charlie was walking across the yard at Terminal Island, this cop came up to him and said, "Manson, you ain't never gonna get out of here." And Charlie looked at him and said, "Out of where, man?"

And that wasn't jive, he meant that. Because Charlie lives every minute of his life, wherever it is, whether it's in solitary or if he's balling 87 girls or eating garbage. That's living. That's life. That's how it's going at that time.



According to Gary Stromberg

How Gary Stromberg came to know Phil Kaufman is not entirely clear, but that they were close friends for years has been verified by many sources. Stromberg, like Kaufman, was devoted to Manson's music; but he also, perhaps even more than Kaufman, was devoted to Manson's teachings and personal magnetism. Unlike Kaufman, however, Stromberg never actually became a follower of Manson, which probably accounts for the brief, spotty nature of the history he left us. Stromberg and Manson spent most of their time together at Universal Studios in North Hollywood, a huge television film factory that specialized in sightseeing tours. Stromberg worked there for a while as a young film director, later became a publicist with Public Relations Associates in Hollywood. While he was at Universal, Stromberg arranged Manson's first recording session. The three-hour session proved to be an embarrassing failure even by the crude recording standards of those days. Manson was unable to understand the demands of the recording engineers, and the recording engineers were unable to understand Manson in any way whatever. At one point, it is said, Manson told Stromberg, "I ain't used to a lot of people." To which Stromberg replied, "And a lot of people ain't used to you."

Now when Charlie was paroled, he knew no one in the vicinity and he wanted to get into show business. So Phil told him I was in films and sent him to see me. He's a charming guy, he really had a charisma.

He used to come over two or three times a week in a bus which he had painted white. And he had painted HOLLYWOOD FILM COMPANY across the side so nobody would bother him. And inside

it was really trippy. He had an icebox and a stereo system and a floating coffee table suspended from the ceiling. The only food they had was cream puffs. Someone had given them a case of cream puffs and every day that's what they existed on. We would all sit in the bus and listen to records or he would play. And we'd eat cream puffs.

The thing that really attracted me to Charlie was that I was working on a story at Universal for a film that took the premise that if Jesus came back today, in this country and this climate and current situation, that he most likely would or very well could have been a black man. We were going to construct a story about Christ returning as a black man in the South today. Naturally the white Christians would have been the Romans.

Charlie is very Christ-like and has a Christ-like philosophy. And he was technical advisor on what Christ's positions would have been relative to certain things. He got very into it because he liked the idea of being an authority on Christ. He has a very sophisticated knowledge of Biblical things. He doesn't read but he seemed well read. And we would bounce things off Charlie in developing the story.

The movie was never made. Universal hated it, despised it.

I never saw anything that would indicate Charlie had racist feelings. He had this whole thing about submission. He felt the only way to totally free yourself was to totally submit, and the freest person in this country was the black slave. He was in a submissive position, and if he could totally submit he would free himself. When the master whipped him, if he could love that master and love that whip, who was the master whipping? But he used to get uptight because he felt the black man in this country was after the white man's ego. And he felt that was getting him nowhere.

When I first met him at Universal, I was taken aback by Charlie. He came in barefoot with his guitar and four girls and made himself at home. And it was amazing the respect these girls had for Charlie. They just lived and breathed by him.

Once when we were working on the Christ story, he demonstrated

the submission thing. He turned to Lynne and said, "Lynne, come here and kiss my feet"; and she got down on her knees and kissed his feet and sat down. And then he said, "Now I will kiss yours," and he did. There was never any explanation or questioning. They just did it. They were so open and trusting.

Charlie had a tremendous feel for people and understanding of how they react. I think it's that street sense, from dealing with people in jail, being a fugitive and a criminal and living by his wits.

One day he was with a crowd of people on the beach, and he was rapping about how material possessions were evil. And one man in the crowd became angry and said to him, "You're full of shit! Here you say you don't need material possessions, yet you have this big fantastic bus." And Charlie replied, "Do you want the bus, man?" and the man said, "Yeah, I want the bus." And Charlie gave him the keys, saying, "Here, take it, I don't need the bus."

Hours later the man returned and told Charlie, "I don't really want your bus. I just wanted to see what you would do." And he returned the bus.

At another time, during the recording session, Charlie suddenly told a company executive, "You know what? The way out of a room is not through the door, partner." The executive was startled and asked him to repeat his words.

And Charlie said again, "The way out of a room is not through the door, because then you just go into another room, which leads into another room, which leads into a bigger room, and you're still inside your cave, man."

"You're still inside your cave," repeated the executive, not understanding the message. And Charlie explained, "Yeah, that's not the way out. The way out is to be willing to give it all up and love every bit of it as being perfect."

But, the executive still was puzzled, saying, "You think that's important, huh? I want to get closer to it. I want to groove, I feel the vibrations."

To which Charlie replied sharply, "Yeah, you feel this. You feel your conditioning coming on. I'll tell you exactly what you feel. You've assumed the beingness of a social worker."

The executive became tense and defensive upon hearing this and said, "No, I'm the furthest thing from a social worker. But you see, to me all things are beautiful, also. But when you said four walls and solitary confinement is beautiful, it was hard for me to groove with that for a minute."

Then Charlie, realizing that the man was ill at ease, comforted him with these words: "I believe you. I believe anything. You never can lie to me. You're perfect, you can never do any wrong. No mistakes. Each song I've been doing is just one mistake after another. I just take the mistake and groove on it and it becomes something else. And I keep making the same mistake until it becomes another thing."

When those in the studio heard these teachings, they were truly amazed and later told others what had happened.

According to Lance Fairweather

The true identity of Lance Fairweather has puzzled Mansonist scholars for years and probably never will be revealed. Apparently the man valued his anonymity as much as his life, for reasons that will become obvious from the following account. We do know that he was some kind of producer in Hollywood and an intimate friend of Beach Boy Dennis Wilson, producer Terry Melcher and, of course, Charles Manson. In fact, he is said to have met Manson while living at Wilson's extravagant Pacific Palisades home in early 1968. Like Phil Kaufman and Gary Stromberg—neither of whom he knew—Fairweather was a devotee of Manson's music, but he felt that Manson should first be intro-

duced to the public by a documentary film before his music could be accepted. For this reason he brought Melcher to the Spahn movie ranch in the summer of 1969.

After the Tate-La Bianca murders and the arrest of Manson, Fairweather sold his house and moved his family to a secret location in the San Fernando Valley. Both Wilson and Melcher moved and Melcher bought a gun and hired a fulltime bodyguard. These fearful actions may seem baffling, if not amusing, to Mansonists today; but one must consider the prevailing attitudes toward life and death that existed in those times.

There have been many dancers in this world that I have seen, but no one ever danced like Charlie. When Charlie danced, everyone else left the floor. He was like fire, a raw explosion, a mechanical toy that suddenly went crazy.

Charlie was certainly a fascinating cat. He represented a freedom that everybody liked to see. That is why we wanted to document him. He really was an active revolutionary of the time in that area. Like Castro in the hills before he overthrew the government. Charlie advocated the overthrow of the government and the police force and everything. He thought it was all wrong, it was as simple as that. He wanted to do more than talk about it, but like so many revolutionaries, he really had no solution. And he didn't have the patience to really wait. Had he waited, he could have had so much more effect with his music. I would say to him, "Charlie, you can do so much more with your music and with film than you can ever fucking do running around in a bus with your girls and preaching the stuff."

And then in January or February of 1969, eight or nine months after I met him, we started recording him. Charlie was living at the ranch at that time, and Dennis and I fooled around recording him over at Brian Wilson's house. As you know, Brian has this studio in his house. But Charlie couldn't make it with those people. They're too stiff for him.

And Charlie always said, he just asked one thing, he said to

me, "I don't care what you do with the music. Just don't let anybody change any of the lyrics." That was one of his big beefs with Dennis. Dennis had taken some of his songs and changed the lyrics around, which really infuriated him. Charlie had a big thing about the meaning of words that came out of your mouth. That is to say, to him all that a man is is what he says he is; so those words better be true. If Charlie said he would be someplace at 4 o'clock, he would be, even if he had to walk. And it used to infuriate him that Dennis would forget what he promised immediately. So Charlie and Dennis never got along that well.

One day Charlie gave me a .45 slug to give to Dennis, saying, "Tell Dennis I got one more for him." Charlie was really bugged with him because Dennis ran off at the mouth so much.

Sometime later I started recording Charlie at a little studio here called Wilder Studio. And the owner, George Wilder, was leery of Charlie because he knew Charlie was an ex-con, and because Charlie to a straight person is sort of a wild looking guy—his eyes, his hair, his movements and everything. So he was a little leery of Charlie and he kept bugging me, saying, "Listen, this guy is an ex-con. I don't know what he's going to do. He might flip out or beat me up or something. And what about my money?"

So Charlie turned to him and said, "Aw, don't worry about your money. You can have all these guitars." And Wilder, dumbfounded, said, "Wait a minute. What does he mean I can have all these guitars?" It really blew his mind. Charlie just walked out, saying, "You can have 'em, man." He was bugged. He left him two or three amplifiers, two electric guitars, an acoustic guitar and some other instruments.

Here is one thing to remember about Charlie's attitude toward giving: Everything Charlie gave away he eventually got back. Only more so. At the ranch one day he demonstrated this attitude by casting a handful of gravel into the air. When the pebbles landed, he reached down and began gathering them up one by one, saying, "You pick up what you want—here, and here, and here."

I wanted Terry Melcher to meet Charlie and make this film

of him. If we could sell the man, his music would emerge, so I wanted some backing for the film. I used to think of Charlie almost as a missionary who would take his people out and start communities.

In fact, one thing that locked me into Charlie and made me think he was really a humanitarian was his great compassion for young girls on their way to San Francisco and the Haight. He wanted to stop them because he knew what the Haight had turned into and that these naive, dumb, wide-eyed girls would be hopelessly lost in that jungle. He said they would be beaten up by the niggers, they'd be raped, they'd go on to speed and so on. And he wanted to put a song out, telling them, "Don't go to the Haight, come to me." And that made sense to me.

And Terry was impressed the first time he went to the ranch. But the second time he was a little leery of Charlie and didn't want to follow up the idea any more. Maybe it was the Randy Starr thing that scared him.

See, the second time at the ranch Terry and I and Charlie were sitting down by the stream, and Charlie was singing. And Randy Starr, this old Hollywood stuntman, was drunk and goofing off and waving his gun around. And Charlie yelled, "Don't draw on me, motherfucker!" and went over and beat the shit out of him right in front of us.

But it was in the spring of 1969 that Charlie really changed radically from what he had been the former year. He started collecting material things, accumulating motorcycles and desert vehicles and even weapons. He kept saying, "I got some great guns," and I'd say, "What is this shit? I don't even want to hear about it." He used to say he needed money to go to the desert, he needed supplies, he wanted ropes to go down into these holes in the desert. He really believed there was an underground people living out there. That was Charlie's dream—to go underground, really live underground, to wait for the revolution.

He believed there would be an open revolution in the streets, the black man against the white man. He said the only people

who survive will be the ones who get out of here and go into the desert. He said the black man doesn't want to go out in the desert in the hot sun; that's where he's been all of his life. He wants to be in the shade, in the city. He believed he would be continuing the race out there, because most of the race would die, as in Revelations 9.

And he believed that the Beatles were the spokesmen; "Helter Skelter" became a symbol. He believed they were singing about the same thing he already knew about. He believed they were all tuned in together. He thought he would meet the Beatles, he even sent some telegrams. This philosophy developed in the last year.

The last few times I saw Charlie, he was like a wild animal. I wasn't frightened, but I could just see it. It was like walking alongside a wild animal, his eyes . . . He wasn't handling the city at all. He said to me, "I gotta get out of here." And I said, "Go to the desert, man. That's where you belong."

After the Tate thing, he came to my house in the middle of the night a few times. It was as if you took an animal from its element. He was always looking around—like a wild person.

The police were looking for him. Also, he supposedly shot a spade in the stomach in Topanga. A friend called me up and said, "You know that crazy guy Charlie? He shot some spade in the stomach, then took his jacket, bent over, kissed his feet and said, 'I love you, brother.' " And I said, "That sounds like Charlie, all right."

None of this was reported to the police. This guy was a dealer, a big syndicate dealer, a real out and out criminal dealer who dealt everything. So these people wouldn't report it to the police; they just take care of it themselves. Charlie figured these people would be after him immediately. The spade lived, incidentally. This was early in the summer of '69, when Charlie was collecting weapons and hanging out with the motorcycle people.

Charlie had a big Negro thing. His color philosophy was that the black man was the last race to evolve and he was going to

take whitey's place. And whitey was going to move up to a more spiritual level. The black man was here mainly to take care of the white man—the police department, the President would be a Negro, everything down to the waiters. They were really totally to serve the white man. Charlie said this is because they are stronger physically and more clever than we are, and they even have more love. They would enjoy to do that.

But he's completely against intermarriage. His philosophy here was a mindblower, too. In fact, when I heard it, I fucking broke out laughing. Charlie said you have to be very careful about selecting your mate, because you'd be making love to yourself. And then he jumped to a reincarnation level where you'd be making love to your own children. He believed in a master race philosophy, that you have to improve the race.

I don't think he's sane. He's a danger to society. He represents a danger to life. Charlie himself has no fear of death. I've seen him do some wild things.

He used to love to get me into the car and drive 100 miles an hour on Sunset in Dennis' Ferrari or in his dune buggy. And I'd just sit there. And finally he'd get the idea that I wasn't digging it but would put up with it, so he'd slow down and drive very slowly, 10 miles an hour.

One night, around midnight, Charlie came by the house when my wife was alone with the children. And he wanted to come inside and take a shower. She was frightened by him and refused to let him in. At this, Charlie went into a rage, shaking his fist and shouting, "If you weren't his wife, I'd beat your face in!" And she knew he meant it.

I think like most schizoids or insane people he walks a very thin line, and when he does walk over the line, he explodes momentarily and then he comes back in. He can get set off, but normally he walks the line all right.

Charlie used to say, "What would you do if I put a gun to your head and made you come and live in the desert with me?" And I'd say, "If you put a gun to my head, the worst you could

do would be to kill me; and I'd just go with you till I could escape."

Charlie was always recruiting. He had the girls, and he was always looking for strong guys because all he ever got was young guys.

I'm sure that if that thing hadn't happened in August, maybe in a year or two we would hear about a whole town, like Lone Pine, being taken over by a tribe of people. Because he wasn't kidding. He had machine guns and walkie-talkies and dugouts. He really wanted to build a fortress up there.

During the past year I asked myself many times, "What made Charlie change? What was the main cause?" And one thought kept recurring: If *Abbey Road* had come out sooner, maybe there wouldn't have been a murder.

That's far out, I know. But *Sgt. Pepper* was such a happy album, such a happy, acid trip, and it made Charlie very happy. And then the white double album was such a down album. I know it affected Charlie deeply. And then *Abbey Road* was another happy one.

And I just can't help thinking: If *Abbey Road* had come out sooner, maybe Sharon Tate would be alive today.



Part VI
In the Land of the Mindless the Blind Man is King

"My friends don't drive. They don't have licenses or identification. They live at the side of the road, they don't have an address. The deputies call them odd looking people, but they're my brothers."

—Charles Manson to Judge William B. Keene.

The Spahn Movie Ranch tilts back from Santa Susana Pass Road as if it had been washed ashore by the primeval ocean that once covered most of Southern California. Tire-less farm trucks, grill-less, chrome-gilled autos rot in the late afternoon sun like dead beached whales. Here and there, piles of mechanical driftwood, rusty pipe and wire and parts of unknown furniture hint at forgotten projects never finished.

"I just sit here and watch the movies come and go," says Squeaky, resting on an old crate in front of the Longhorn Saloon. The movies she watches, of course, are a more cosmic variety. Life as seen in the road show version.

It's been some time since the last Hollywood filmmaker left the ranch, another Grade B quickie under his belt, and the Longhorn Saloon now entertains only a shiftless crowd of brokendown stoves and refrigerators inside its boarded doors.

The saloon, the entire warped frontier boardwalk, appears absurdly small and two-dimensional from the dirt road 20 yards away. It is a village for cartoon people.

Behind the boardwalk, maybe another 20 yards back, the land drops down to a shady riverbed. The greenness of its riverbank oak is matched only by the few puddly remnants of last month's creek. Beyond the river lie the hills, a surreal assortment of odd rock formations, twisted paths and treacherous midget cliffs where some of Hollywood's earliest and finest were ambushed—Tom Mix, Hopalong Cassidy, the Cisco Kid.

The stench of horse manure is everywhere at the Spahn ranch, mainly because the horse manure itself is everywhere—on the dirt of the parking area, on the paths, on the grass, on your shoes. The rugged young members of Charlie's family, of course, have no shoes, nor do they have a sense of stench.

For some reason they seem to have this thing about horseshit. They love to run through it in their bare feet, especially in the corrals at the east end of the ranch where the stuff covers the ground several inches deep.

Shoveling horseshit is one of the few chores the family really gets into in an organized way, shoveling horseshit and searching for garbage. They've shoveled it in Malibu, in Topanga Canyon, and at the ranch, sometimes working in shifts to pay the rent. And at the ranch, you know where they dump it? That shady green creekbed behind the saloon.

Not exactly the magic of Hollywood, but there is a kind of magic here nonetheless—a sense of intimacy with the universe. Lazy afternoon cosmic buzz. Motion slowed to the beat of natural change. Kevin and Marc sleeping on an understuffed Thirties sofa, posting guard outside the hollow fake jail with its bars of wood.

Actually, there *are* a couple of celebrity types still kicking round these parts, come to think of it. Show people, you know. There's Pearl, George Spahn's sweetheart—she used to be in the circus.

And there's old Randy Starr, Hollywood stuntman and friend of the famous, he lives here. Right now he's getting himself together, sorting out gear in the back of his black Cadillac. You can tell he's been around. His name is printed in gold on the outside of the car.

"I'm goin' on location, see," he drawls. "Got this movie coming up, *Reverse of the Magnificent Seven.* See, these guys take over the town.... Then I come along, I'm the lead heavy. They always get me to play the heavy."

And you can see why—the thin mustache, a face creased and pitted from a lifetime of biting dust. In person, though, his grisly features, his huge nose and sad eyes, give him a friendly, even humorous look. He resembles an elderly Ringo when he grins.

"But in the end, see, I wipe out nine of 'em before they get me," he says with outlaw pride.

Randy straps on his chaps, branded with images of guns and horseshoes, and ties down his reinforced steel holster "that all them quick-draw guys use." From his briefcase he pulls a newspaper clipping, "Rodeo Rider to Appear at Fete," an old monster magazine showing Randy pursued by an amorphous blob called the Creeping Terror, and some snapshots.

"Here's a pitcher of me when I was really ripped," he recalls wistfully. "That was my birthday last year. Boy, was I ever in my reincarnation then. Whew, I'm telling you!"

Randy has been in about a hundred rodeos. One of his favorite acts is hanging himself, actually jumping off a platform and hanging himself with a rope around his neck. He says it's a real crowd pleaser, especially since he doesn't use a protective harness or any of that other sissy stuff.

Then there's the neck drag act. Randy calls it the Death Drag. It's like the hanging act only instead of jumping off a platform, he ties the other end of the rope to a horse and lets it drag him around the ground for a spell. "Just plain stupidity, I keep doin' it," he admits with a sheepish drawl.

"I played a rock and roll star one time in this nudie cutie movie called *The Invisible Man.* I take this tab of acid, see, and they show me gettin' on this aer-o-plane. I get up in this plane, and they get shots of me makin' it with these girls, havin' an orgy, kind of. Then the plane crashes and I get reincarnated into this gardener in a girls' college.

"And these girls, see, they sit around chantin', tryin' to bring me back in my other reincarnation as a rock star. They're chantin', and at the end this picture of me comes on and I'm gone."

Clem Tufts lopes over to offer an alternative ending: "You coulda been the sun and like exploded into a thousand trillion billion pieces, KA-POW!" Clem falls about, miming the primal void collecting itself, "like a zillion tiny molecules, man, swirling about in space. And then you could've like come together, like all these atoms in a spiral, and then . . . you could've become the sun again," and he crashes blissfully into the fin of the Cadillac like an off-course binary star.

Nearby, the horses, of which there are dozens and dozens—two corrals full—take in the scene, digest it without reaction. A silent order of stoic witnesses, they have seen everything that has happened at the ranch for years. All the answers to all the terrible rumors and questions about this place, all the missing pieces, they have seen first hand.

Do they understand? What must they think of this strange family of children that moved in on them two years ago? What must they think of Clem, the midnight dancer, the grinning blond boy with infantile eyes who spends his days in endless dry fucking—clutching the simply clothed hips of ever-ready sisters—and his nights in solo flights, prancing under the moonlight and hooting his animal songs? Clem claims he can talk to the horses. What has he told them?

The horses are the ranch's true family; it's really their ranch. They provide George Spahn's only source of income. For $3 an hour they carry renting weekend riders over trails that wind through an infinite bill of private Westerns.

But in recent months the horses have noticed a new crop of visitors, day-tripping tourists come to have their pictures taken in front of an old wagon with a sign above it reading SPAHN'S MOVIE RANCH. Postcards of the hanging. Is this where that bastard really lived? Are those the kids he ruined, hypnotizing them into taking marijuana and having premarital sex with him?

Their righteousness gives them courage. Onward, Christian soldiers. They don' just slow down, they actually stop their cars! Gray-haired, middle-aged couples actually stopping and getting out, grabbing their snapshots with instamatic boldness, then splitting. A new adventure bagged, another conversation piece when the television's over.

Around a hilltop water tower a mile away, a jeep with a citizens' band radio slowly circles, checking out another "false alarm." "This is the choicest cop beat in L.A.," says Squeaky. "I bet they cast lots for it."

A bunch of bikers come screaming down the road. "Hoorah for Charlie!" they shout and zoom away.

The sun is starting to set now, robbing things of their color. The green and brown brush-covered hills pale to blue-gray, eventually to black. Because of the hills that surround the ranch, the sun rises later and sets earlier than it does for the rest of Los Angeles. The days are shorter for the family, the time less marked.

In the twilight the tribe gathers for a council meeting on the steps of one of the shabbier shacks at the ranch, located at the extreme west end, apparently used as makeshift sleeping quarters for temporary hired hands. There is no light inside, the electricity having been disconnected from the ranch long ago, and no plumbing. A broken picket fence leads to an outhouse where an amateur arrangement of pipes that once drained into the river has since stopped up. Where there used to be a formal front door, a huge sign from a hot dog stand now keeps out the cold evening breezes which already have started to whip up from the riverbed.

The council of elders has assembled, and Gypsy—eldest and earthiest of the women—rises to speak.

"God is all experience, God is love, love is everything and everything is nothing, because it all comes from nothing and goes back to nothing," intones Gypsy as if it were the text from which tonight's sermon will be taken.

"The reality is what is happening to this planet. We can close our eyes to it, sleep through it and watch it die. We can play

all the games, put on a suit and tie and become part of the lie. Or we can stand off from it and do what is natural and good, as trees do, as fruit does, as the grass does—as animals, not as civilized, machine-made plastic people.

"They try to stop you because you are jeopardizing their way of life. Because they depend on the machine, they are machines themselves. And the two can't live together very long. The machine has just about done in all the plant life, there's hardly any good clean earth anymore. It's two strong forces—one is the negative and one is the positive—and they're destroying each other."

The words come from Gypsy's mouth, but it is Charlie who is speaking. The phrases, the ideas, the rhymes, the gestures, are exactly the same, as if Gypsy's own identity had been erased. Gypsy, also known as Charlie, AKA Squeaky, AKA Clem, AKA Sandy . . . the frightening list includes them all. A dozen or so little Charlie Mansons are living at that ranch right now! And who knows how many are not living at that ranch?

"Charlie is the only person I've ever met who just tells you the truth and doesn't even understand someone having bad feelings about it," continues Gypsy. "It's hard to live with a person who tells the truth all the time. Why? Because lots of time we don't want to hear the truth.

"Charlie knows the truth because he knows nothing. He knows the power of an empty head.

"Charlie taught us that instead of dying slowly and treacherously—aging—you can speed up the process and do it in your mind. Because you're right at the point of life and death all the time. Every time you're totally willing to die, it brings you right back into living. The point of death is rebirth.

"In order to love someone, you have to be willing to die for them. I'd do it. I'd give up my life for you. That's what Charlie's doing. He's giving his life for the whole world!"

The others nod in affirmation. Amen, brothers. For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Charlie. They already know all the words to this sermon. They all know all the words to all

:he sermons. It's just Gypsy's turn tonight. Tell us about the paranoia, Gypsy. Tell us about the rabbits, George. No, no, tell us about the vision, the vision of the desert. Yeah, the desert, and the part about the Beatles.

"In the desert you can forget your mind completely," begins Gypsy. "When we were in the desert, we learned to sit on rocks all day like coyotes. We got so we reduced all our wants, we found out we could live on very little because we had to.

"The desert is heaven. The rocks are pink and mint green and baby blue. There are cactus pears and castus apples and berries you can eat, and lttle leaves rolled up like cigarettes you can smoke, and rivers that run away from the ocean that are always warm, and blind fish that swim there.

"There's a whole part of Death Valley that's a pine forest that nobody knows about. Everything hides under its opposite, you know. It's really paradise, an old legend, an old dream.

"The desert is the perfect place because no one else wants it. If you go to the forest or into the mountains, someone is going to come along and want what you've got. Nobody wants the desert, so that's the last place they will come.

"We are going to make another pilgrimage. We know we will be the last people. When we see L.A. in flames, then we'll split for the desert. Everything is there that we need. You know that part in the Bible:

> *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*
> *I will fear no evil: for thou art with me and maketh me to lie down in green pastures, and leadeth me beside the still waters.*

"There are these old legends among the Indians that when the Spanish came, that's where Montezuma went, Eldorado. There are Indian tribes that they followed into Death Valley that were never found because they went down to the center of the earth through this passage.

"The lowest part of the earth is in Death Valley. There have been these gigantic explosions there. A whole mountain will fly

off and leave this giant hole. The Fault runs right through Death Valley, and in the last time there will be an earthquake that will open up the earth for all those who love.

"There is this pool in Death Valley which goes down to the center of the earth, where the aware live forever. They sent divers down this pool to find out what it was, and they never came back. Now the government has put a wire fence around it.

"There will be a door of water that will open up for us to enter. You know the Beatles song, 'Glass Onion'? Well, the glass onion is the door of water, and the 'hole in the ocean' is the pool in Death Valley."

Suddenly a loud shriek interrupts the sermon. Something has just shot out of the shack, hit Marc on the shoulder and bounced a good 10 feet into the darkness. It is a cat. The whole thing happens so fast, in such a cartoon fashion, that the council breaks up for a moment, laughing and shouting a chorus of wows and pshews.

"Wow!" is the way Clem puts it. "A cat! Pshew!" Clem really knows how to tell a story. Meanwhile, what was Gypsy saying about the Beatles?

"The dream can be real when you see it, and when you live it. And that's what the Beatles are singing about. They're singing it's all a dream, life passes by on a screen. They're singing it, but they're still asleep singing it. They haven't woken up to the fact that what they're singing about is more than a song. They could be living it.

"They have the power—and this is directed to them—if they would realize how much they're the ones, then just the point of their finger could send 144,000 people back to the desert. They could point to Charlie and say, 'This is the man who's saying what we're saying. Let's all get together on it.'

"Then all of a sudden people stopped taking acid. Everyone went back to the plastic city, went back to their jobs, went back to their wives. Their egos got fat again. We were the only people who stuck with it.

" 'Give up everything and follow me,' Christ said, and we have given up a lot to follow *our* dream. There are other communes, but everyone has their old lady and their old man. It's just the same old song in different costumes.

"There are no couples here. We are all just one woman and one man. 'All you need is love.' We were the only ones gullible enough to take the Beatles seriously. We were the only people stupid enough to believe every word of it."

When Gypsy says *stupid*, she means it in the family's positive way, like *empty-headed* or *mindless* or *innocent.*

Or does she? It's possible at times to detect faintly a darker wisdom about her, a sort of motherly cynicism; as if she, more than any of the others, understands the terrible thought that must be growing daily at the reach—that the chances of ever being with Charlie again are not very good at all.

"What can I say to the damn Beatles?" asks Gypsy, slightly exasperated. "Just get in touch, man. This is their trial. And all the things they've been hearing—there's something happening here; they should see it by now. It's hard to see through the negative, but just tell them to call. Give them our number.

"It's not that there's anything to say except hello to your brother, and how are we going to get this thing together? Because it's coming down fast. Don't let it break you."

During these last few words of Gypsy's, everyone for some reason starts leaving the steps, quickly jumping off and standing at the side in mock formation. What is going on?

Someone—Marc or Clem—sings a fanfare, "Dum da DAH," and announces:

"The king is coming!"

The king? Where? Everyone is staring at the shack. Has somebody been in there all this time? Listening? One of the hands?

It gets weirder. Now the hot dog sign starts to move, to open, revealing a vague outline in the dim candelight from inside. What is that, a stick? Yes, a stick, followed by a hand, followed by the bent-over body of a man—an ancient man—wearing a suit, tie,

Stetson, gloves and large dark glasses.

Squeaky runs up the stairs, grabs his arm and chides gently, "Is Pearl still pickin' on ya, George?"

So this is George Spahn—blind George Spahn, 83 years old dressed like a cowboy stud. And this shack, this pathetic excuse for a bunkhouse, is where he's lived in darkness all these years.

George doesn't reply to Squeaky, he doesn't say anything. No one does. Pearl is there, she takes his other arm; and together the three of them prepare to descend the palace steps.

The trip takes ages—he is so old and uncertain, like a palsied Lazarus not sure the miracle was such a hot idea. He takes the steps one at a time, testing each one first with his stick, then his left foot, his right foot, the next step, his stick, his left foot, his right foot, the next step.

And all this time no one says a word. The kids stare back and forth at each other and grin, half in respect, half in mockery. One almost expects a legendary child to dart from the gathering and yell, "Look, mom, he's naked, he's not wearing any clothes!"

When they reach the bottom of the stairs, Squeaky says goodbye, and George and Pearl trudge on to their station wagon and dinner at some Chatsworth coffee shop.

It's dinner time for the family, too. They all pile into the red and white trailer near the road and sit in a huddle at one end. The area is about seven feet square and serves as living room, dining room, bedroom and playpen for "the elf."

The elf is Sandy Good's baby, Ivan. To the family, all babies are elves. They are considered the true leaders, little gods. Their actions are sacred.

Clem will sit for hours with Ivan, flopping his head from side to side, imitating his sounds, falling on the ground and screaming when he screams, crawling, sucking bottles. "I have an oral fixation," says Clem as he jerks off an empty coke bottle. He even gets behind Ivan's strained peaches.

One of Clem's favorite tricks with Ivan is holding him by his leg high in the air, dropping him and catching him again by the

leg when his face reaches an inch above the ground. "Sometimes his legs get funny and stiff and he can't move them," Sandy explains. "But we just shake him out by the feet, and in a few days he's OK again."

All the other babies have been taken away. Sadie's kid, Zo Ze Se C Zadfrack, is in Juvenile Hall. The others were confiscated by parents, often with the help of the District Attorney. Only Crazy-legs Ivan is left to lead them into the promised land, the hole in the ocean.

After everyone finds a comfortable position on the wall-to-wall blanket in the living room—not an easy task in these cramped circumstances—the women bring on the food. The dinner is remarkable. It's really a feast, a half dozen potfuls of different preparations—steaming hot stews and crisp salads—all made from fresh garbage vegetables plus various sauces and seasonings. Delicious.

Since there are no tables in the trailer, there's no point in having plates or silverware. The pots themselves are passed around, with serving spoons, each diner scouping out what he wants for the moment, knowing it will be passed around again. And again. For dessert the girls have baked two giant apple pies.

While eating, the family discusses one of their favorite endless subjects: how fucked up everything is.

"When we were out in the desert," recalls Marc, "the cops came down and said, 'Where's your permit for nudity?' Wow! Can you dig that? You have to have a permit to take off your fucking clothes." The anecdote earns much gleeful laughter, even though most of the kids were presumably there when it happened.

"You even have to have a permit to make love," Marc adds. "That's what a marriage license is."

The conversation becomes kind of a show-and-tell indictment of the world. Next up—Brenda, one of the prettiest members of the family.

"You can still get put in jail for sucking someone's dick," she informs them with a childish smile. "I was in court the other day, and I wandered into this room, and I didn't know what was going

on. Everyone was looking horrified, and there was this girl on the witness stand saying, "I don't know how to say it. . . . It was awful. he made me get down and . . ." and she starts crying.

"It turned out that this guy had asked her for a blow job. Shit, you'd think she'd been made to swallow poison. Everyone in the court was making noises—'shocking, disgusting,' etc. And it's all about sucking someone's dick, for Christ's sake."

Now it's Clem's turn. Clem really is on his own trip, or at least he's much further advanced than the others.

"I was in jail with a bunch of Panthers," he says, "and they'd tell me it was coming down. They had this chant, 'Look out, whitey, we're coming to get you.'

"They have this plan, and they will take over because the white man's karma is almost used up. If you read Revelations, Chapter 9, it's there. They are going to open up the bottomless pit, and the only people that will escape are the people that go to the desert. There won't be very many who make it—144,000, that's all."

So far it's the same story that all the kids in the family tell at one time or another. But now it gets to be pure Clem.

"The Beatles know about it," he continues. "At the end of Revolution 9 there's that shout, 'Block that kick! Block that dick!"

Block that *dick*? Is that what he said? Block that *dick*?

"Yeah, you know, near the end, 'Block that kick! Block that dick!' "

Somewhere in the mind's arena a crowd goes wild. The score is tied, the clock is running out. The goalie for the Tottenham Hotspurs has performed beautifully today against this visiting team of cunning Africans, but the tension mounts. Suddenly . . . Mother of God! . . . it can't be . . . a giant black phallus mushrooms out of center field . . . intercepts the ball . . . bounds toward the vaginal goal. The crowd, like a million screaming banshees, cries out, "Block that dick! Block that dick! Block that dick!"

But Clem has his own bizarre vision, and he's not joking.

"There are a lot of black men who want to put their pricks in white women," he continues. "For hundreds of years the white

man has been saying, 'Don't touch my woman!' That's like saying, 'You want her, don't you?' And so the black man finally believed it and now he's going to get it.

So?

"So you have to preserve the species, you can't mix everything up. It's like robins mate with robins. How would you like everything in the world to be gray? That's what would happen if every species mated with every other species. Just a gray glob.

"If God had planned it that way, he would have made us gray to begin with."

The strangest thing about Clem's vision is that everyone else in the trailer agrees with it, nodding affirmatively throughout. That realization brings with it a vaguely unhealthy feeling, the sense that a final barrier has fallen. One can now believe almost anything about this family. Not exactly a comforting suppertime thought.

After the evening meal, the family usually gathers under Charlie's picture on the living room wall, singing his music and feeling the good love energy that flows between them. At least that's what they tell us.

But there's something different on tonight's agenda. A young man in a starched white shirt arrives, calling himself a TV producer. Apparently he has met Gypsy and Marc before, and they introduce him to the group.

"We're doing this hour-long TV special for ABC," Gypsy announces after demanding everyone's attention. "It's just going to blow everybody's mind. It'll be just us—singing, eating, being together."

The family mulls this over for a moment, then Sandy asks:

"How much are *we* getting for it?"

"$50,000—minimum!" brags Marc.

"Only $50,000?" she asks.

"That's just the *minimum*, you understand. That's the least we'll get."

Sandy's newborn business sense makes her suspicious. "Is it signed? Do we know we are getting that money?"

"Well no," interrupts the producer, choosing his words slowly. "We haven't actually signed the contracts . . . but it's pretty much of a sure thing."

"It works this way," Gypsy explains. "He gets 50 percent and we get 50 percent. Now that's fair. After all, we *are* using all his equipment."

Clem begins to calculate. "So you mean . . . we would get $25,000 of that?"

"Minimum!" says Marc.

More calculating by Clem. "Wow!" he says. "That means we could each get a dune buggy! We could get like ten of them!"

"Yeah! And we'll get them built to Bruce's design," adds Gypsy, "when he gets out of jail."

Right! Everyone lies back and savors the tasty picture. This is going to be an Apocalypse to end all Apocalypses, if you can dig that! Los Angeles in flames—cops and judges and mums and dads all turning into bacon—and each of us in our own, shiny, brand-fucking-new dune buggy, tooling out to Death Valley to save the white race. Far out!

What is it about these kids? For the first time in hours, maybe months, they've suddenly come alive, become enthused as a group. The talk of money and material goods has somehow struck a nerve. A passion or two has been stirred. Is this their true love energy? Whatever it is, it keeps building.

After the producer leaves, Gypsy asks to hear the tape of an interview we did with her earlier in the day. Actually, we have no choice since she took the cassette and has refused to give it back until she censored it. That in itself seemed a little incongruous at the time.

She says she wants to hear it back to "make sure the world is ready" for what was being laid down. And, well, there were a few lines that *could* be misinterpreted, you know, like that phrase "all the people we've tortured, all the people we've killed." That refers to the whole of Western civilization, not just a personal trip. Except that it is that, too, if you understand, because we're all

one and you are me and I am you. But it could be misinterpreted.

Earlier, when Sandy first heard about the tape, there had been some hesitation in her head. A whole hour of Gypsy rapping? Who wants to listen to that? Why don't we all just write something instead, and you can pay for it?

As a matter of fact, the interview wasn't that valuable; Charlie had already said most of it. The whole matter is so petty—petty theft versus petty jealousy.

Anyway, the tape starts and Sandy strides coldly into the main bedroom at the other end of the trailer. But she keeps the door open.

Gypsy listens to her own words, digging herself completely. She is her best audience, laughing at some remarks, agreeing vehemently with others, never losing a look of awe at the mystery of the woman she is hearing.

Finally Sandy can stand it no longer. She storms in, points to the machine and declares, "That tape is not going out of here!"

The family stares up at Sandy, not knowing what to say. Gypsy shuts off the machine. "Why not?" she asks.

"I don't have to tell you why. That tape is staying here and that's that! It's not leaving here because we don't want it to."

Dig that? *We* don't want it to, and *she's* not even on the tape.

"Sandy, where's your head at tonight?" Gypsy snaps. "You know, you've still got a lot of your mother in you."

"Look, it's quite simple," says Sandy. "If we give away all our stories in interviews, we are going to have nothing to put in our book. I thought we were going to put it all down and get a publisher to give us a big advance. This is just like pouring all our good material down the drain.

"Anyway, what do we need ROLLING STONE for when we're going to do this TV special for ABC and we'll reach maybe 20 million people?"

Now the whole family joins in, throwing all her inconsistencies back at her. The tape doesn't belong to her, they say. You couldn't possibly make a book from the scant material it contains. Charlie

himself agreed to a two-hour interview—the longest one yet—and asked nothing. What about this idea of giving? Of keeping nothing?

To which Sandy's answer is as simple as it is final: "Look, I don't have to argue about this. I *know*. And when you know, you know." And she stomps back into the bedroom.

Wow, man, a supreme bummer. The party's over; everyone gets up to go outside. There's a fantastic full moon out there, in case anyone wants to go bareback riding. Clem leads the way with dancing feet.

As the family files out, Sandy, with great care, places a manuscript on the center of her bed and lies down beside it. Slowly she reads each page silently to herself, almost secretly. It is a letter from Charlie.

He gave it to her that morning when she visited him in jail. He told her to take it to the Los Angeles Free Press where they would print it for all his followers to read. Next week he would have another one, he told her. And another one a week later.

She is pleased that so many readers will now be able to see Charlie's words, his teachings. What was it Charlie said about words? Something that rhymes, she recalls, something about nail or betrayal or something. Oh, but that was about Jesus anyway.

When people read Charlie's words, things will start to change, she thinks to herself. The world will start going through some heavy changes, you can count on that. And even if the Free Press won't pay any money, the letters should help sell a few records. It's all to the good.

Tomorrow the letter will become public; Sandy will take it over first thing in the morning. But tonight, she realizes, Charlie's own words and his own handwriting belong exclusively to her.

She finishes the last page, closes the manuscript, then starts reading the first page again. Only this time she grabs a pencil and starts boldly marking up the page here and there with words of her own.

"I've got to put it in better English," she tells Brenda in the kitchen. "Charlie's spelling is terrible and he doesn't know how to write properly at all. But we'll fix it up."



Annie Leibovitz

The Great Banquet Table of Life —We Deliver

By Robin Green

I wanted all things
To seem to make some sense.
So we all could be happy, yes,
Instead of tense
And I made up lies
So that they all fit nice
And I made this sad world
A par-a-dise

—Bokonon's "Calypsos," from
'Cat's Cradle,' by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.



Know All Men by These Presents: That we, the undersigned, have this day voluntarily associated ourselves for the purpose of forming a corporation under the laws of the State of California, and we do hereby certify as follows:

First:

The name of this corporation is:

Institute of Human Abilities, Inc.

Second:

The purposes for which this corporation is formed are as follows: The specific business is the educational and scientific pursuit and development of the human mind as fully and to the same extent as a natural person might do, and the additional objects are as follows:

1. *To construct and lease or rent for profit apartments, homes, multiple family dwellings of all types, motels, hotels, and mobile parks, and office buildings.*

2. *To re-sell at a profit all types of structures and businesses herein-above described.*

3. *To sell at wholesale or retail goods, wares and merchandise.*

4. *To distribute merchandise.*

5. *To do such things in any part of the world.*

6. *To hold without limit, purchase and convey, exchange, lease, sublease, mortgage or otherwise acquire and dispose of real and personal property, both within and without the said State of California, and in all other states, territories and colonies of the United States, and in all foreign countries and places.*

In witness whereof, on the 29th day of December, 1969, we the undersigned as to be the First Directors of said Institute of Human Abilities, Inc., have hereunto set our respective hands.

Wilbert V. Baranco Jr.
Robert Kerr
Paul Robbins

The Blessing

Victor Baranco lounged in his shorts shooting poker chips off the backyard fence with his B-B gun. He had been lying there off and on in suburban Lafayette, California, for nine months, ever since he had discovered the answers to the mysteries of the universe: Who am I and why am I here? "Since there are questions," he had thought, "there must be answers." And he had found the answers and realized he was perfect. There wasn't anything else to do but lie down.

"I am 34 years old," he told the blue jay who frequented his backyard. "I have done everything there is to do. I have been a *maitre d'* in a fine restaurant, and a used car salesman. I have won cruises for being a top refrigerator salesman. I have peddled phony jewelry and flown people to Las Vegas to gamble. Some of the great people of the world—Mort Sahl, Francis Faye, Christine Jorgensen—know me by name. I have a wonderful wife, two perfect children and a Thunderbird. I have traveled to Los Angeles, Reno, Hawaii and Mexico. And now I have solved the biggest logic problem of all."

Two psychiatrists had already told him that it was a contradiction in terms to *teach* self-realization to other people. "Since I have discovered that there are no limits on me," he told the blue jay, "I will not accept that limit. I want others to know what I know. I want to serve the world unselfishly and make a profit."

He lay down his B-B gun. "I will call what I know the More Philosophy," he declared, and he put on his pants and went out to spread his words among the people.

It's More! It's the great banquet table of life! It's a corporation! It's the Institute of Human Abilities. Oh-oh! Sounds like another of those encounter group things. Well, no, not quite.

—Aquarius Magazine, Published by the Institute of Human Abilities

It was three years ago that Victor felled his last backyard poker

chip. Now the Institute that Victor founded to teach the More Philosophy has grown to be a *chain* of communes so efficient and profitable that people in Berkeley refer to Baranco as the Colonel Sanders of the commune scene.

Victor knew that for making money, real estate was the soundest investment. He has bought run-down old houses, lived in them, fixed them up with his own labor, and sold them for a profit. Then he figured out a new plan. He bought a decrepit Victorian house on a dead-end street in Oakland and populated it with some hippie fugitives from the dying Haight-Ashbury. He told them they could live in the house if they would repair it. It took the young people more than a year to repair the fine old house, restore it to its original beauty, while Victor lived with his wife and children in his comfortable Lafayette home, watching the investment appreciate.

Today there are six restored houses on that dead-end street, and ten more in Oakland, Lafayette, Berkeley, San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles and Hawaii. Four more are in the works. Nearly 160 full-time residents each pay $200 a month rent, which entitles them to room and board, parties, affection, and the opportunity to restore dilapidated houses for Victor.

Besides rental fees—$384,000 a year—the Institute also collects money from some 70-odd weekly courses at $45 each. Then there's the equity in the houses restored by More labor, plus a non-profit organization, TOTA, recently set up to collect government and foundation funds for housing alcoholics, nonplaceable foster children, and parolees.

"Even without the philosophy," Victor recently told students during one of his weekend courses, "the machine still works. What you got is a situation in which you can live in a More House for $200 a month as long as there's ten or more people there. And you can live better on the $200 than you would with $700 if you didn't live there. And that's with maid service and your laundry done, and your food cooked for you."

Where the $200 a month residence fee comes from is up to the

individual. Some people collect unemployment for as long as they can. Some get money from their parents. Some work part time in the outside world.

The manager/teachers of the More Houses, "house mothers" as they are called, pay a fee of $2000 for that privilege. They never own the property; the landlords are always absent. The $2000 pays for a complete catalog of courses—including special instruction on how to run a commune—which a manager is required to take before he can call his place a More House.

"Everything is handled by the way Victor set it up," says Ken Brown, one of Baranco's right hand men. The structure helped them get more out of life, he added. Didn't that take away their freedom, though?

"Freedom? We call it default to live unstructured, unplanned lives. It's more fun when there's a structure. That way we are told how to live and we can tell other people.

"Victor is like our father. He takes responsibility for everyone here. We always know we'll get the truth from him."

Place Your Orders

We are aware that the vast majority of human beings on this planet are leading lives which they consider far less than perfect. This needn't be the case. Whoever you are, and whatever you want more in your life, we can show you how.

Weekly groups are held in private homes. People come to make new friends and have an interesting evening playing games designed to be fun and at the same time increase awareness of how one is in control of one's own life. The beginning groups are called 'Mark' groups. Yes, that's right. Like 'pigeon' or victim.

—Aquarius Magazine

It was a hot night in Oakland, California. The claustrophobic apartment where the mark group had assembled was even hotter:

the curtainless windows had to be kept shut or no one would be heard above the sound of traffic outside. The one-room dwelling was crowded with "marks"—prospective More Housers—who sat on aluminum and grey plastic chairs, lay on the single-sized water bed or huddled here and there on the floor.

(In the following scenes, I have changed the names of "marks" and "evaluates" to protect the innocent, and, for that matter, myself.)

On any night of the week, wherever there are More Houses, groups of people like this one—computer programmers, teachers, students, dental assistants, clerks, pharmacists, pharmacy delivery boys, jobless longhairs, hippie chicks—pay $2.50 to sit near each other and play structured games directed by a group leader.

Our group leader was Chris, a healthy young woman whose bosoms were falling out of the front of her low-cut satin shirt. "OK, Arnie," said Chris. "Now I want you to name five things that you want, and I'm going to try to see that you get them."

Arnie, a husky, prematurely balding college kid, sat folded shyly next to the wall on the floor. It was his first Mark group. He squirmed, his eyes looked frightened. "I feel so uptight," he said. "Paranoid."

"You've never made a mistake in your life," earnestly lisped Bryce from across the room. He gazed at Arnie intently, like a hypnotist. "You've never made a wrong decision in your life." Instead of calming Arnie, Bryce's fervor made him more confused and upset.

"It's OK, Arnie," Chris reassured him. "Just tell us five things that you want. That's what I'm here for, to see that you have a good time and get what you want."

Arnie sat pulling at his bottom lip, stretching it inches and letting it snap back into place. He took a deep breath. "My name is *Arnie*," he began. "I want to be free, to overcome my inhibitions, to attain my creative potential, to have a beautiful relationship with a woman, and, uh, to really know what I want."

Chris rolled her eyes, and everyone snickered. "Arnie, how can

I get those things for you? Name some *material* things. Five *material* things."

"Oh," he said, blushing. "Material things." He started in on his bottom lip again. "I want a stereo, a car, a house by the ocean, some new clothes, and a waterbed maybe."

"Well," said Chris, breaking the silence. "It's still hard to get you what you want. Don't you see, Arnie? You lose by not wanting things you can get."

Chris turned to me. "Robin, you've been here before. Why don't you tell us what you want?"

"I want a leather watchband, some flowers, embroidery thread, and some herbal shampoo," I said.

"I'll make you the watchband," Roger volunteered.

"I'll get you the embroidery thread," said Chris. "Come to dinner at the Harper Street More House on Thursday night, and I'll give it to you then."

"I'll get you some flowers," Frannie offered between giggles, "and give them to you Thursday."

Then Chris shifted her attention to Arthur, a veteran of these group meetings, and the two exchanged warm glances. "OK, Arthur, now you."

At 40, Arthur was older than anyone there and had an air of knowing what he wanted. He had swaggered in earlier, his green drip-dry shirt opened practically to his waist, and hugged and kissed Chris. Then he had sat down at the feet of the girl whose apartment it was, under a Dennis Hopper poster. Sometimes he rested his head in her lap and stroked her skin with a forefinger.

Now he straightened up and smiled confidently. "Certainly, Chris. I want a waterbed, a shirt with a More House symbol on it, I want to have a good time and to make out with Chris and Patty here." He patted the girl's knee.

"Penny," she said, reddening.

"Oh, right. Penny."

"A More House is a residence hall; it is a training program in living; and it provides the public with a place to go and find out how to live

and love it, to have what you want, to see what enlightened people look like."

—Aquarius Magazine

I arrived at the Harper Street More House on Thursday night for dinner. In my pocketbook I had a bottle of strawberry body lotion for Frannie, the girl who had promised me flowers. Her want list included four strawberry-scented products—lotion, vaseline, soap and oil—and some body paint. Sensing that she liked strawberry, I had told the saleslady at the Body Shop to put a double dose of the scent in the lotion.

The house was prematurely dark and the halls were gloomy. In the front hall was a list of house rules that gave the place the feel of a dormitory:

No drugs of any kind
Telephone use by permission only
Public rooms—living room and dining room only
No Overnight Guests
House Closes at 11:00

Frannie appeared, looking like a fading kewpie doll with brittle bleached hair, circles of rouge on her cheeks, red lipstick and shapeless print dress—over the hill at 18 years.

Tonight, she explained, was the first night of the Institute's six-week course in Advanced Sensuality. She was very excited about taking it and giggled more than usual. The acid she said she'd dropped for the occasion might have helped, too.

I gave her the lotion and she said thank you, apologizing for having forgotten the flowers she'd promised me.

She led me through the house, through the dining room and kitchen to a back hall where there was a room as small as a closet. It was her bedroom. The one window in the room overlooked a rubbish heap in the backyard. We have to sit down because the slanting ceiling made it impossible to stand comfortably. Plaster had fallen off the wall, exposing patches of bare, dirty boards.

Frannie's touches made the place seem homelike; her upright suitcase served as a night table; a cracked mirror was propped

up on a board-and-cinder-block dressing table. She had hung up a blanket to give her bed privacy.

Frannie was what the Institute calls an "evaluate," the lowest of the low on the More House corporate ladder. As Ken Brown, the new president of the Institute put it: "When people move in as evaluates we push them, treat them like victims. Say you're working in the kitchen hard all day, doing your best, and you get to the point where you don't think you can do any more. That's when we tell them to drive to San Jose to get us a taco, and to top it off, we don't give them money for gas. We prove to people that they can do more than they thought they could, so they can feel like heroes.

"As Victor would say, 'The way to enjoy your life is to do whatever anybody wants you to do, to be a slave.' "

Frannie's duties had been mostly cleaning and scrubbing, a privilege for which she paid $200 for two weeks. She had borrowed the money. Frannie said she was enjoying herself and was doing everything everyone told her, hoping to live there forever and one day teach courses of her own.

We could hear angry voices coming from the kitchen. It was Shannon, one of the house elite. "It smells in here," she complained.

"Well, people don't clean like they should, that's all," said Bryce, who was the Harper Street Housekeeper.

"Who was supposed to clean the kitchen?"

"Frank."

"And what about that pile of dust in the front room?" Shannon was getting angry.

"I don't know," said Bryce meekly.

"Well, are you going to take care of it or do I have to do it myself?" Shannon was furious. The house elite were supposed to be free of such menial tasks.

Bryce stomped into Frannie's room and yelled at her. "What's that pile of dirt doing in the front room?"

"There was no dust pan," Frannie explained, giggling nervously.

"Well, couldn't you have found anything else?"

"No."

"Of course not. All you ever do is giggle," he said contemptuously. "Well, see that it doesn't happen again." And he stomped out. We could hear him in the kitchen bitching at an apologetic Frank, another evaluate.

Actually, Shannon was right, it did smell in here, and it was getting stronger—a strangely sweet odor not unlike rotting fruit. It was Frannie applying her strawberry lotion.

I quickly wandered into the living room which was furnished in 1960 Sears-Roebuck, with tacky wall-to-wall carpeting and a television set. On the wall was an out-of-focus photograph of a fat man dressed in white, one hand raised as if in blessing.

Bryce came in and identified the fat man as Victor Baranco.

"Have you ever met him?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Not yet. Everyone else here has met him but me, even though I've been here for months."

"Don't you want to?"

"Yes, but he's too powerful and I just can't confront him yet."

"Too powerful?"

"Yes. He's got so much power. He's responsible for all of us."



At dinner, the candlelit table was set for 16, but only eight people showed. Frank scurried around, putting last-minute touches on setting the table, serving food, fetching koolaid. Hardly a word was spoken. Shannon sat at the head of the table; she seemed glum and depressed. She told me that she had been to a professionals' meeting, where teachers pay $35 for a few hours with Victor.

"Victor hexed me a lot," she said.

"He hexed you?"

"Yes. He had a whole bunch of things to say about how this house was doing."

"Was he mean to you?" I asked her.

"Oh, no! He wasn't being mean. Just truthful."

"Do you like him?"

She looked at me for the first time. Her eyes widened and glazed over. "Oh, yes! I love him." Moments later she left the table.

I asked Ray, another teacher, what Victor had done to Shannon. What was hexing?

"Life is like an elevator," Ray philosophized. "It goes up and down. When you hex someone you take them down, and then you can bring them up again if you want to."

What about the Institute courses, I asked.

"They're all great," said Ray. "We guarantee a flash of your own perfection with every weekend course.

"In the world out there, you are taught that everything is wrong. We're all doomed by ecology and wars and stuff. Well, Victor has taught us that it's really all right. Out there you don't feel like you can do what you want. But living here, where everybody thinks the same way as you, that they're perfect just like they are, it works out. And it does work out. Like Victor has everything he wants—a house, a limousine. And this is the first business that hasn't fallen through for him."

I left the house alone. Alan, a young man from the Mark group who had asked me to meet him that night, had not shown up. And I didn't get the embroidery thread from Chris. She must have forgotten she had invited me to dinner, because she never showed up either.

Parable of the Hamburger and Other Courses

Think now of what this country's population is made of. 90% are hung up, bound in value judgements, bored, hating, fearing, grieving. They are the living dead. Call these the less people. Grieve for them. They have resisted life. But there is hope

for them. There is a complete Human Being under each one of those piles of garbage. —*Aquarius*

Once a mark has decided to follow the More House road in search of his own perfection, he is encouraged to take any of the dozen Institute courses listed below. Well, not *any*; the courses that Victor himself teaches (at a weekend salary of $500) are restricted to marks who have taken at least two non-Victor courses—marks, in other words, who have already contributed $90 to the Institute. (The advanced course *A Weekend with Vic Baranco* does not necessarily, as the title would imply, include a weekend with Vic Baranco. Recently it was taught by his 10- and 12-year-old children.)

Here, then, are the official courses, their description and fees, as listed in Aquarius Magazine:

The Gospel

Two days are devoted to comparing the More philosophy with THE WORD as written in the Bible. The parallels are startling. This course has been and promises to be one of the most dynamic experiences ever offered. $45.00.

Hexing

Hexing is a conceptual game which every human being is playing every time he opens his mouth; but very few people are aware of the game. This weekend course will provide you with the history, technique, structure and applications of hexing. The extent to which one can control his hexing is the extent to which one controls his universe. $45.00.

Advanced Hexing

This course is both what its name denotes and connotes. Total control of one's hexes, of all kinds, is total control of one's universe. It is possible to get all that Advanced Hexing has to offer. $45.00.

Basic Sensuality

Two days which will show you the physical and conceptual techniques to overcome impotency and frigidity, to increase the duration and intensity of orgasm, to train partners and to experience pleasurable childbirth. Also covers completely the concept of responsible hedonism. $45.00.

Basic Communication

A two-day seminar covering the basics of successful communication and the techniques of removing barriers to communication. This course will increase the effectiveness of your communication and teach you how not to be victimized by the poor communications of others. $45.00.

Advanced Communication

An extension of the Basic Communication course, dealing more deeply with non-verbal communication, with winning and losing, and with controlling the universe with words. Also, this course deals with both animate and inanimate objects. An incredible weekend. $45.00.

Jealousy, Money and Possession

A two-day seminar covering topics such as ownership, trust, betrayal, interpersonal relationships, money and jealousy. How to have more and enjoy more of what is already yours. $45.00.

A Weekend with Vic Baranco

A totally unstructured weekend in which the instructor will answer any and all questions asked. The content of this course is totally dependent on the student's ability to have. $45.00.

Man and Woman

This course deals with the roles and the language of the sexes and with the dynamics of the relationships these create. The course teaches how to interpret Manese and Womanese, and how to understand the math of one and two. $45.00.

Shazam

The granddaddy of all courses. Seven hours with Victor Baranco. In this course there will be a very limited number of students each time it's taught. There is no limit to how high this course will go. $45.00.

How to Go into Business in Your Spare Time with No Capital Investment

This is the course of courses. During the weekend, Vic will answer all your questions on the meaning, structure and teaching technique of any, or any part of, the structured courses. The course is intended primarily as an advanced seminar for teachers and potential teachers but may be attended by anyone seriously interested in how to produce from cause that which they experienced as effect in Institute courses. Participants

are expected to attend with specific questions to be answered about courses they have taken and/or taught. Prerequisite: Two structured courses. Price $65.

Professional Meeting with Victor Baranco
Thursdays 2-5 PM $35.



Linda, a sweet, 24-year-old Oklahoma girl, sat in another tacky More House living room in Oakland wearing a brave smile. With her hand she gracefully stroked the underside of the shaft, the head and the white balls of the erect, larger-than-life, plaster-of-paris penis which sat in her lap. Finally she grasped the thing in her fist and moved her hand up and down.

"It's just really neat, 'doing' a man," she said, shrugging. "And a really neat way to get close to some people and have a good time." Wayne, her husband and co-teacher of the course, smiled at her approvingly and caressed a plaster vagina. And Victor Baranco, who had married the couple two weeks before, smiled on them from above, from his ubiquitous photograph on the wall, his hand raised in blessing.

I was taking my first Institute course, Basic Sensuality.

"You aren't going to hear anything that you don't already know." Wayne began. "All the stuff that I'm saying will be true. We'll reteach you how to love another person in logical intellectual steps.

"Fucking is such a hit or miss proposition."

Fred, a recently deflowered 18-year-old, was clearly disappointed. "You mean fucking is no good?" he asked, worried.

Wayne explained that intercourse is a haphazard affair. Instead, the Institute recommends mutual masturbation as a "sure-fire way to a perfect orgasm every time." He called it "doing" the other person, and told us how to do a perfect "do."

"According to Masters and Johnson, the average number of contractions per orgasm for women is six to nine, and eight to 12 for men," said Wayne. "But after a couple years of training we've

had people here at the Institute have as many as 250 contractions per orgasm!"

"Who does the counting?" I asked.

"Why, the person who is doing the doing," said Wayne.

Wayne got on the floor with his course assistant, a juicy plump 16-year-old named Beulah, to show the class positions to sit in while doing the other person. They taught that it works out best when the "doee" is totally passive. Mostly the positions were just common sense. But as Victor says, if you are bored by his courses, it's you who are responsible.

For homework, we were given an exercise to do—go home and take a bath, put on our favorite perfume, light candles and burn incense. "Then put a 'do not disturb' sign on the door," said Wayne, "climb into bed and masturbate."

On both days of the course, Wayne ended the sessions three hours early. "Forty-five dollars and they don't even give you lunch," grumbled a mark named Fred as we walked outside during the break. "It took me three days of work to earn the money."

Fred's buddy Michael, however, seemed more enthused about the course. A 17-year-old, football-playing high school student with braces and skin that pulsated with impending acne, he had revealed in the class that he was a virgin. "But not for long," he told me now. "I think I'm gonna do it with Betty tonight."

"Who's Betty?"

"She was there this morning. The teaching assistant."

"You mean Beulah?"

"No, you know, *Betty.*"

"The lady with the grey hair who took our money?"

"Yeah, that's the one. I was supprosed to see her last night, but her son was having his 26th birthday party and she couldn't see me."

"How old is *she*?"

"Forty-eight," said Michael with a slight wince. "But I try not to think about it."



I had decided the best way to meet Victor Baranco was to enroll incognito in one of his courses; but the thought of blowing another weekend—and another $45—on one more non-Victor course was hardly tempting. Fortunately, Wayne and Linda for some reason dropped that prerequisite in my case and said I was ready to attend Victor's Man and Woman class the following week.

The class assembled in a trim middle-class neighborhood in Oakland, in a brown stucco house which was, according to a sign in front, FOR SALE. The students sat in folding chairs and on the floor facing Victor, a massive man dressed in a tan guru shirt, his wife Susie, and two teaching assistants.

"In this course," Victor told his students, "we four are the power. We've been through the knothole of life, and come out the other side. And you, the audience, are the stimulus. Questions?"

He explained that the success of the course depended upon questions from the class.

But no one said a word. Victor looked around the room, a pained, martyred expression on his face. "It looks like it's going to be another one of those weekends," he finally sighed, disgusted. The students shifted uneasily in their seats and avoided his glance.

"OK," he said with another sigh, "I suppose I'll have to run it down for you. It's like this. We all know that there is only One, the universal Being. You know, the 'I am Buddha' thing. But if you live on that high a level, you don't have the fun of relating. So you come down a level. Then there's you—number one, and there's 'other'—number two. And the relationship between the two is where you play."

The students nodded in understanding. One girl rocked back and forth in her chair as he spoke, muttering to herself, "Right on, right on."

From there, Victor launched into his philosophy of Man and Woman. He told the class of the two languages that people speak, Manese and Womanese. One is the voice of reason and logic; the other is "randomnity," emotion. The role of woman is to direct the man; the role of man is to provide the power.

"It's like a boat," Victor explained. "The woman is the steerer, and the man the motor. And once you can relax, men, and settle down into slavery in the motor room—what a gas! They take care of you sexually, feed you and clothe you. They take care of all your creature comforts, and all you gotta do is shovel coal." His students laughed with him in appreciation of his wisdom.

From the boat analogy, Victor moved onto the parable of the hamburger. "If she offers you a hamburger on a roll with sesame seeds and lettuce and tomato and pickle and mustard instead of ketchup, and it's all the hamburger you have in the house, and all the stores are closed, and she worked hard to make it, *if you eat that hamburger*, you lose. You'll spend the rest of your life eating garbage. You've got to demand ketchup on that hamburger or you're cheating yourself, and her too.

"Any time that I'm willing to have us lose because of your inadequacy, or mine, we both lose."

The students listened so attentively to his theories that by afternoon, everything had been made clear. No one had any more questions about Man and Woman. Victor whined at the class, "Isn't there anything at all you guys want to know?"

One young man sat at Victor's feet, looking up at him with admiration. "We'd like to hear about *you*," he said, and with that, Victor began the Story of Victor. Many in the class had heard the tale before in other classes, and settled in appreciatively, like children hearing their favorite bedtime story.

It began with the courtship of Susie. "I had such a ball with this broad," said Victor. "She was a young 18 and I was an old 24. On the second date she said she didn't like my brand new Ford, so on the third date I came back with a new MG. We used to fly to L.A. to catch a night club act at the Crescendo, you know? $50 for lunch. We had a wonderful relationship, you dig?

"I introduced her to show people—Mort Sahl, Frances Faye, Count Basie. They used to have ringside seats for us, and every act of the show was for Susie. She was 18 years old, baby—18, understand? She hadn't seen *anything*. One time Christine Jorgen-

son was up on stage. She saw me and says, 'Vic, come backstage after the show.' And Sue was going out of her mind. I was showing her the *world.*"

Susie was the daughter of a rich doctor in Sea Cliff. Her father disapproved of Victor. "I was a bum. I hadn't done anything socially redeeming. I made big money since I was 14, but it was always big money in shady ways. Not necessarily illegal, but shady.

"Like I had this whole network of corporations tied together, five of them. It had been done all on the float because there was no money there. I put four of them in my son's name—he was only seven—and bankrupted them. That way he was liable. But what the hell, in seven years he'd only be 14. I kept the sound one in my name."

The students sat in rapt admiration of Victor's cleverness.

He went on. "A hustler is what I was. Do you guys know what a hustler is? I pushed phony rings and watches, the whole thing. Good-looking jewelry that wasn't worth anything. Like I would pretend to be a truck driver, with an overload of goods, or I had an engagement ring set and my girl decided to marry somebody else, and I'd be crying the blues in a bar—after the time when the jewelry stores were closed, of course.

"I owned a store that dealt with sailors on Mason Street, selling them diamond engagement sets—and they didn't even know a girl! They were 17 and from Iowa someplace and had never seen the big water before. We wouldn't even give them a diamond. It was such an incredible hustle! We'd guarantee the thing was genuine, but what it was, was a chip. A ten-point chip in a sparkle setting. And it looked big. It was worth maybe eight dollars. The box that the ring was in cost me a buck.

"I made a lot of money, but her father was right. I was a bum. So I decided to go straight."

The people in the class had never been close to anyone like Victor before except on television, and his sleazy past excited them.

To Victor, going straight meant dabbling in three new "enterprises"—managing a greasy drive-in restaurant in his home town

Berkeley, working as a bookie for the Mafia and hustling washing machines for an unsavory fat man who became one of the first to experience Victor's special power.

"It was a cutthroat operation," Victor recalled. "The 300-pound manager took an override on all my sales. That shook me up, so I shook *him* up. Oh, that was horrible!" He giggled. "I complained and complained and nobody would do anything about it. By this time my old lady was pregnant, so I grabbed that manager one day and banged him into a wall a few times, just to get his attention. He actually wet his pants!" Victor laughed delightedly and everyone in the class laughed with him.

It was then, said Victor, that he discovered a good way to make money legally. "I wasn't qualified for anything, really. But I was going to school to learn how to be a contractor. In my spare time I was buying old, beat-up houses, and fixing them up. You buy a house that's the most run-down, put your own labor in it, and sell it at a profit. Remember that house in Alameda, Susie, with the hole in the floor? Five thousand dollars it cost me. That was *some house*, an old Victorian."

The class sat in adoration as Victor spun them the further tales of his life, how he'd once been a bouncer in a night club and worked his way up to be a *maitre d'* wearing patent leather pumps and tails, how he'd flown people to Las Vegas to gamble at the casinos, and finally, how he'd flashed to his own perfection, and retired. From buying and selling bankrupt businesses and houses he'd earned a drawer full of money which supported him while he lay for nine months in the backyard of his house, shooting poker chips off the fence. He had discovered that he had as much right to be on earth as the rocks and trees. He began to tell other people what he had discovered, and started the Institute of Human Abilities, and hadn't had to work a day since.

The course was supposed to continue until 10:00 on Sunday night, but at 6:00 Victor summed up his philosophy on Man and Woman. "If you flash that you're a man, just look and see what you're doing, and that's what a man should be doing. And the

same for a woman. You don't have to do nothing. Just be old you, and that's steering. And he'll be old him, and that'll be motor. And the more you be you, the more he'll be him."

And then Victor made an announcement. "We usually invite our classes to stay for dinner on Sunday nights, but you are the dullest class I've ever had. It's so dull, in fact, that I'm not even going to bother to come back for tonight's class."

With that he bounded out the front door to his waiting, chauffeur-driven Cadillac limousine, leaving behind more questions than he had answered. Obviously, if I was to understand the strange, glib power of this super hustler, a private audience would be required.

Victor's power was undeniable, at least for some. I had expected the marks to be infuriated by his rude departure, but instead they simply beamed at each other basked in the warmth of his enlightenment. The girl in the rocking chair turned toward the door through which Victor's 270-pound body had just passed, her face radiant with adoration, and said, smiling, "He's so heavy."

Daily Bread, Daily Gravy

July 28th was the scene of many parties in celebration of Victor Baranco's birthday. Everyone who understands that life is good took the opportunity of Victor's Day to celebrate what we call the Victory of Being. There were birthday celebrations in all the houses and love was the theme.

"Of course no one could resist showering presents on the one who has been responsible for the past three years of our exciting communal existence.

"The party at Lafayette was a beautiful affair. All of the guests received gifts from Victor, much to their surprise. The real pleasure of the evening, however, was in watching him open his gifts. There's no ripping and tearing when Victor opens presents. Instead, each moment is savored

as he experiences receiving with such studied elegance. Every detail of each selection is carefully noticed and appreciated. The guests were overwhelmed by the 2½-hour present-opening spectacle. The following quote from Victor's Man and Woman course explained to me the magnificence of this man's approach to giving and taking:

"If I give to you so that you may have, I've taken
If I give to you so that I may have, I've given.
If I take from you so that I can give to you by being a willing receptacle, I win.
If I take from you so that I might have, I lose."
—from "Social Notes," a column in Aquarius Magazine.

In some respects the Institute for Human Ability is like a perpetual summer camp for grown-ups. For $200 a month each camper gets the chance to live in a family like the one he left behind, with an authority figure who tells everyone how to live and get along with each other, gives them chores to fill up their time, and arranges planned activities to participate in.

Campers are also given a membership badge—a shiny medallion with the More symbol on it, like an upside-down peace sign bisected by a horizontal bar. It is given to each perfect person at a special presentation ceremony, and is supposed to "remind the wearer that he is a winner."

Planned activities include mark groups, outings, and parties. The More people party all the time. This year's Halloween bash at the Institute's main house on Hamilton Street was crammed with bodies ("wall-to-wall people," they call it), packed so tightly that it was practically impossible to get to the bar.

Out on the front porch it was cooler and less crowded. A girl in a belly dance costume did her version of a belly dance, though no one paid her much attention. Billy sat alone on the front porch railing, watching the party. He was 15 and had been living at the Institute for a year and a half. His father lived there, too, and was the Institute's live-in lawyer—though, Billy said proudly, his Dad didn't do much work anymore.

Before he moved into the More House, said Billy, he was ready

to kill himself. His parents had been in the process of separating because his father wanted to go with Victor and his mother would have nothing to do with the Institute.

"Everybody took sides," he recalled. "My older sister went with Dad and my younger sister stayed with Mom. I was supposed to stay with her, too, but I didn't want to. She hated Victor. She used to say that him and Dad should be strung up by the balls.

"She told me that she heard that Victor had $80,000 hidden away in a Swiss bank, and that she was sure he was going to run out on the Institute and leave everybody in the lurch. She wanted me to stay away from the Institute and my father. Finally I told her to fuck off, and I moved in here."

Billy said he was happy at the Institute and was better off there than at home. He had his own room, stereo and TV set.

"Once we had a tour of kids from school come to visit this house. They expected a hippie commune but they were really surprised at how good we live here. We are taught that it's OK to believe in material things, and we do. We're good Americans."

Inside the house, next to a four-foot-high More symbol made of blinking electric lights, stood a bug-eyed young visitor, a photographer who said he always liked to party with these people.

"It's nice," he explained, "the way they're always smiling, and I think that living here makes them feel good. Most of them when they come here are really down and out, in the middle of an identity crisis, and the Institute sells them identity. But I can't stand the way they worship Victor. It's always 'Victor says this' and 'Victor that.'

"Most of the people find a place for themselves here. They either become hustlers, like Victor, or they stay around and become servants. But I've got to hand it to them; they're up front about the hustle. Like they always tell me when there's a rich person at a party. They want me to take pictures of that person for Aquarius Magazine so they'll be flattered and join the Institute."

(One wealthy San Francisco couple, I learned later, were not so flattered by the Institute's attention. Invited to a mark group

by their friend, the group leader, they soon became nervous and reluctant to participate in the structured games. So during a break their friend handed the husband a drink, saying, "This will relax you." It didn't. On the way home the man suddenly started tripping on acid while crossing the Oakland Bay Bridge, and the next day he was committed to a mental institution.)

Also attending the Halloween party was the managing editor of Aquarius Magazine, Dewey, a narrow-faced man who was dressed as a playboy but looked more like a penguin. Dewey said he ran the magazine from a basement closet, and his toughest task was to edit Victor's regular column "Head Trip." Each month Victor would send him a tape-recorded parable which he would have to transcribe and edit to a printable length.

"They're so heavy," said Dewey, handing me a favorite "Head Trip." It was about a woman motorist who debated for weeks whether to pick up a hitchhiker she passed each day. Finally she decided to try it, figuring if the guy was a weirdo, he wouldn't have been waiting there so regularly. And he killed her. There was no moral to Victor's story, but the heaviness was obvious.

Dewey gave me another copy of Aquarius. "This magazine is deliberate," read the title page. "There are no typographical errors." Inside were pictures of More Housers, Institute gossip, plus other instructional stories. One particularly delightful tale concerned a bunch of wretched characters who lived in a concentration camp, surrounded by squalor and barbed wire. There were no toilets, and their food was thrown on the ground with their shit. Every day an executioner would drag one of them to the chopping block and bloodily decapitate him in full view of the others. After several paragraphs of lurid description, it turned out the victims were actually chickens. Again, the story had been written by Victor Baranco.

Dewey said he had just taken his first course with Victor, a new course called "How To Go Into Business Without Any Money."

"It was a special $65 course," said Dewey. "I learned a whole bunch."

"Why was it $65 instead of $45?"

"I don't know, but it was worth it. Mostly he just answered the questions that we asked him. He did talk a lot about selling love. He ran it down to us in the analogy of the vacuum cleaner salesman. See, businesses do this thing, he told us, where they advertise a cheap model, the $19.95 machine, to lure people to the store. Well, it's called a 'nail-down' because the salesman is supposed to treat it like it was nailed down to the floor. His boss wants him to sell the customer the $150 model.

"And the boss is right, Victor said. He should get his asking price. He is entitled to his profit."

Dewey shifted the weight of his penguin body from one small foot to the other.

"Say a customer comes in," he continued. "The lady needs a vacuum cleaner. And the salesman wants to make a sale. So, Victor said, the salesman should reach into his own pocket and shell out the $150 for the vacuum cleaner and give it to the lady. That way everybody wins."

"But what about the salesman?" I asked. "He's out $150."

"Victor said that was the question that people always ask."

"Well, did he give you the answer?"

"Yes, he did. But I didn't hear it right. Something about loving."

Dewey mused. "I've got it! Giving your money away is a loving thing to do, so you win by it."



"Victor has given me a new life," said Ken Brown, Institute president and one of Victor's most enthusiastic believers. The 51-year-old former school teacher from Daly City, California, lounged on his More House bed and spoke eagerly of his conversion.

"I was a middle-cass man living in the suburbs with my $16,000-a-year job, having sex maybe three times a week. The Institute turned me on and showed me the way to heaven. Now we do three hours' a day worth of sex."

Ken, whose thinning hair hangs to his shoulders, has been living at More House one and a half years. He says he went to a psychiatrist for seven years before he came to the institute.

"We at More House believe that every day is Sunday," he said. "We believe that we are on Earth to have a good time, to devote our lives to pleasure. We call it responsible hedonism. We indulge ourselves all the time."

He explained that teachers at the Institute call themselves priests because they are spreading the word of love. "This is a religious institution, really. It's a business, true, but the Catholic Church is, too. It's the same hustle in a different package. but we fit into the tenor of the times, what with the communes and all."

Ken's wife Mary bustled into the room, carrying a tray of freshly baked cookies. "Our main function is service," she said. "We teach service in the kitchen, living room and bedroom. People serve Victor totally. He has a chauffeur, everyone waits on him, he gets anything he wants. I just made these cookies to take to his house tomorrow."

Ken was quick to add that he too serves Victor. "I take care of business for him, buy property, deal with realtors. And I hustle money for the Institute when it's needed. Like if there's a phone bill and we're short of money, I hit on people for their dough. Because I know that if they put $150 of their hard-earned money into the Institute, they'll win by committing that much—unless they feel like they've lost. It's *their* loss really. It's up to them whether or not they feel victimized."

President Brown smiled proudly as he loosened his tongue.

"The Institute is a good scam," he said. "We call ourselves hustlers, and other people marks. Victor hustles their asses and their souls. He takes their dough to feed himself. But he sees to it that they win, too.

"We only hustle people for their own benefit. If someone comes into the institute with money, we push on their money victimization. We teach them to let go of their money. It's better for them not to hang on to it for security."

Soon Ken and his family will be moving from Oakland to subur-

ban Lafayette, where they will live with the Institute elite, and Victor himself. "To live near him is an honor," said Ken. "He's the highest being I've ever met."



When he first met Victor Baranco several years ago at the Sexual Freedom League in Berkeley, Bobby Kerr was a lost soul. He had watched the Haight-Ashbury die and was left confused, afraid and searching. Victor realized there were lots of people like Bobby who were looking for friendship and something to do with their lives. But Victor was too old and straight-looking, and he needed Bobby with his long hair and beard to attract marks to the Institute. So he made him a Director.

"Come with me, Bobby," Victor said to him, "I'll give you anything you want."

"I want a Facel Vega," said Bobby. Victor bought him the $10,000 sports car and explained his plan.

"I didn't trust him at first," Bobby recalls. "He didn't think there was anything bad about controlling people. He told me that money was nothing but dirty green paper, not a cause for bad. And he was enjoying himself. His idea was to con people into enjoying themselves, too. He made sense to me, and I got hooked."

Today, Bobby Kerr, 28, is no longer lost or searching for something to do. He is retired. He has trimmed his hair and beard to look just like Victor. He spends his days lounging, learning tennis and "relating" to his new puppy. Occasionally he teaches for the Institute.

Course prices, he told me, were much too low compared to what Masters and Johnson, Esalen and other growth centers would charge. "We're like a discount house of growth organizations," he said.

I asked Bobby what his qualifications were to teach. He seemed annoyed, although it was hard to tell because his puffy, indulged-looking face seems constantly pained.

"Hey, baby," he sneered. "We sell truth and love. There are

no qualifications needed to speak the truth."

Bobby then related the miracle of the man with the scrunched-up hand who was healed by Victor during one of his classes. The afflicted fellow had two fingers missing from his left hand, which he held in a fist because he was ashamed. When Victor noticed this, he called him "Stubs" in front of the whole class. The man blanched: *Victor had said the unsayable.* But the words freed him, and he unclenched his fist and kept it so from that day forward.

"And then there was this other guy," Bobby continued. "A spook . . ."

"Spook?"

"Yeah, you know. A nigger." He laughed at my surprised expression. "It's OK, baby. We believe here that all words are good. Like, I'm a redneck, and that's OK."

"You mean you go around beating up hippies?"

"Oh, hey, baby." Now Bobby was clearly annoyed. "I *am* a hippie. Why, I was there when Kesey was doing the Acid Tests. I look straight now, but I was the weirdest of the weird. I was the first hippie in San Diego."

These days, however, San Diego's original hippie is into investment. He owns two of the Institute houses. While Victor was preaching his hard-sell philosophy, Bobby handled More House financial and real estate matters—before his retirement, that is.

Bobby explained the business structure of the Institute. In 1970, he said, the Institute grossed $186,000 in resident fees and courses. This year it would be close to twice that figure, about half a million dollars.

Each More House is run as a separate, completely self-supporting corporation. "Take Lotus Land, for instance," said Bobby, referring to the only More House owned outright by the Institute itself. "There's 12 people living at Lotus Land." That meant, he said, that from resident fees alone the Lotus Land corporation was worth $28,800 a year—plus profits from courses taught there and the equity of the actual house.

The commune business is so successful, in fact, that Bobby and

Victor are getting feelers from land developers who can't populate their developments.

"One man representing a large housing development syndicate approached us," Bobby recalled proudly, "and offered us $650,000 worth of real estate with no money down because he saw what a good thing we have going here."

I recalled Ken Brown's words: "We *are* like Colonel Sanders. We can reproduce our thing anywhere. The product is words. And the attraction is love."

And the Institute recently found a way to tap another source of bodies, said Bobby, a non-profit organization called TOTA—"Turn On To America." While the Institute can't, as a profit-making corporation, accept contributions and grants, TOTA, a More House subsidiary, could—large government funds for aiding the underprivileged: alcoholics, nonplaceable foster children and parolees.

According to Aquarius Magazine, "The TOTA sanctuary program is a residential program available to anyone who feels he hasn't been able to make it out there and wants to stop pushing himself and simply lie around and do what he wants to do without having to worry about how to survive." Under such a plan, the government would pay the $200 monthly fee.

"We're like a little town on a trading route," said Bobby, "with lots of people coming through. We're like a soap opera. You know, like *As the World Turns.*"

The $19.95 Banana

"As the damn thing spreads, we suck up the outside. Pretty soon we own the butcher, the garage, everything, dig it? Now if it turns out that we do the whole thing, sell everybody love, then we'll start selling hate. The same machine will work."

—*Victor Baranco*

People at More House say that only those close to Vic Baranco ever go to his house in Lafayette, California. One man said that people were blindfolded when they *were* taken there. Another spoke of high fences guarded by fierce dogs.

But, in fact, one phone call got me an appointment with Baranco for the next day, and directions to the house.

Lafayette is a shopping center of a town set abruptly to one side of a commuter's freeway that runs east to Walnut Creek from Berkeley and San Francisco. Indistinguishible but expensive split-level homes checker the low hills surrounding the shopping center.

Per directions, I drove far back into the wheat-colored hills and up a twisting gravel drive, at the end of which I came upon a truly vibrating vision: Victor's house and his Jaguar XKE and his 1960 Cadillac limousine (with fake zebra interior)—all painted electric purple.

Bobby Kerr, dressed in purple, came out of the house, followed by Victor's fat collie, and gave me a tour of the grounds. If Victor wanted to shoot poker chips off his backyard fence today, he'd need a rifle with a telescopic sight. He owns 17 acres of land valued at $240,000.

Fourteen More House elite currently live with Victor, either sharing his house or camping out in a large tent in the backyard. For their recreation, said Bobby, Victor plans to build a tennis court behind his purple garage.

Victor had not yet returned from his afternoon rhetoric class at the Berkeley campus of the University of California . . . a course described by Bobby as "the art of persuasion." (Baranco says he doesn't read well: his wife attends classes with him to take notes.) I was led into the house and told to make myself comfortable.

Despite its outrageous exterior, Victor's house inside is as conventionally tasteful as any upwardly mobile middle-class home. The living room was decorated with a console stereo, color television and five-foot-high table lamps at each end of the couch. Two carved bird figurines stood guard by a More House symbol on the fireplace mantle. On the hearth was a clay sculpture of eight people in bed

under grey clay covers.

The paintings in the room looked like premiums from a savings stamp redemption center. One, a painting of a melancholy clown, was signed by Victor Baranco.

From its perch in the front hall, a photograph of Victor blessed the living room and made me feel vaguely uneasy. I had been left alone—except for a small puppy gnawing on a teddy bear in front of the fireplace—to wait for Victor's real presence, and I could hear worried voices coming from the kitchen:

"Does Victor like what I'm making?"

"Well, I served it to him once, and he didn't yell at me or anything."

As I sat on Victor's couch I remembered a story he had told in class, about Paul Robbins, the Institute's lawyer and founding director: "I said to him, 'I'm not going to read the small print on the contract, but if I ever find out that it isn't right, or if it ever causes me trouble, I'll kill you.' "

Later I had spoken with Robbins, a short, frizzy-haired man described by a colleague as a "shlock business lawyer."

"You take what Victor says with a grain of salt," Robbins told me. "He's really just a lovable little bear who wouldn't hurt a flea. Unless he wanted to, and then he'd crush you in his own way."

Suddenly I heard the crunch of wheels on gravel, and from the living room window saw a station wagon pull into the drive. The house exploded with the sound of scurrying and voices crying, "Here he is, here's Victor."

Victor's chauffeur, a scarfaced, pot-bellied man, ran around and opened the rear as Victor, all 6 feet, 2 inches, and 270 pounds of him, rolled out. He wore what looked like state trooper sunglasses.

His people rushed to the front door to greet him. Followed by his wife Susie, an attractive, oily-haired woman who clung closely to his side, Victor strode through the front hall.

"There's something wrong here," he announced, barely stopping to point out the foam rubber Teddy bear stuffing scattered over

the living room rug. Two women immediately ran in to clean it up, mumbling apologetically how puppies will be puppies.

Without breaking stride, Victor nodded and brusquely instructed me to come up to the "Inner Sanctum." I followed him through a hall and up the stairs. "It's proper manners for the man to go first in this situation," he said. "It's good etiquette, and I think it's also so that women can look at men's asses." He chuckled to himself.

The "Inner Sanctum" turned out to be his bedroom. Wife Susie crawled onto the king-sized bed and collapsed. "My wife will do the interview lying down," he said.

Victor recognized me. I told him I had attended his Man and Woman course.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "You were driving the Morgan."

"That was the class you left early because you told us we were boring," I reminded him.

He laughed. "Oh right, I remember. Actually, the reason we left was that there was a program on television that we could only get in Lafayette, so we had to come back here to watch it."

He seated himself in a rocking chair. I sat on one of the fake leopard-skin director's chairs next to him.

"I have a lot of questions to ask you," I began.

"Yeah, well, before we do that, sweetie . . . I don't remember your name."

"It's Robin," I said.

"Yeah, well Robin, before we do that, if you want to succeed at your interview, why don't you tell me what kind of shock value you are trying to develop, if you know, and I'll answer in accordance."

I said I'd just like him to answer a few questions for me.

"Oh, it's going to be like that," he sneered. "You're going to try and be tricky."

"No."

"Well, if you tell me what direction you want to go in, I'll give you the answers you want." I repeated that I wanted his answers

to my questions, and then I'd know what to do with them.

"Oh I see. You want to have a fact sheet, and then you'll decide what the shock value is." He seemed pleased and more relaxed once he'd explained to himself what I was up to; he smirked as he settled back in his chair. His eyes were hidden behind sunglasses, but he rarely looked in my direction anyway. He never answered my questions directly either.

He sighed and stretched and seemed bored from the start. His voice had a familiar sound. Like Shelly Berman, or Mort Sahl, he spoke with a whiny, sarcastic tone, as if he were a salesman and I a dumb customer who had come in to buy the $19.95 model advertised as a lure.

"In the Man and Woman course," I said, "you told the class that men are the slaves of women, but smart women act like slaves so the men will think that they are slavemasters instead of slaves." I asked him to explain what he meant.

"Did I say that?" He seemed totally disinterested. "I never remember what I say because I always speak the truth when I speak."

I decided to ask some simple questions, hoping for some straight, simple answers. What did he like to watch on TV?

"Dramas of any sort. Movies. Right now *Star Trek's* on."

"Is that a favorite?"

"No. I can tell you every hour of the day what programs are on. But mostly dramas and commercials. We watch all the commercials. For the same reason we watch dramas and television at all. We watch because it's a total index of what's happening in our universe."

A woman came into the room and set a tray full of finger sandwiches in front of Victor. The crusts had been carefully trimmed off. "Thank you, baby," he said and ordered a coke with ice. She scurried out.

"Where were we, sweetie?"

"I was about to ask you another question . . ."

He sighed and shot a disgusted glance at me. "You didn't get an answer to that last one," he snapped, then laughed derisively

when I couldn't remember what it was. "It's gonna be like that, huh? OK, go ahead. It doesn't matter. It was really a very interesting answer, but go ahead."

"No, go on."

"Well, if you're going to watch TV from a position where you exist, but not from your viewpoint, and there are a whole bunch of viewpoints out there in the universe, that magic box will give you all the viewpoints that are prevalent throughout the world. You watch NBC news about China and what you get is NBC's filtered view of China. Take away the filter and what you get is what is happening in China."

He sat back and smiled. I felt like I was back in his class again, listening to Victor's little truisms. He lifted his V-neck sweater over his head, and his huge belly fell out of it, covered by a yellow satin T-shirt. He removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes like a man exhausted by the stupidity of the world, and stared at his size 13 sneakers.

Though he continued in a bored monotone, Victor warmed slightly to questions about his early years. He was born in Berkeley in 1934 of a Negro father and a Jewish mother. He described himself as the neighborhood punching bag because he was a "fat, smartass Jewish kid, and because I used multi . . . uh, multi . . ."

"Syllabic," shot a voice from the bed. Sue had lifted her head off the pillow. I thought she had been sleeping.

"Multisyllabic words," he said. "My parents were intellectuals."

Victor was shuttled from one grammar school to another, and finally to a school for what he called "exceptional" children—where they had a two way mirror. "I knew that there was someone behind there, observing my behavior and noting it all down on a clipboard. I remember going up to that mirror, knowing there was a face right there watching me, picking my nose and wiping it on the glass."

Bobby Kerr came in and sat down on the bed. "This is the funnest interview I've ever done," Victor said to Bobby, and then to me, "You talk clean, baby."

He went on about his childhood. At 13 he was manager of a paper route. Did he ever have a paper route himself?

"Shit no!" he sneered. He and Bobby laughed identical hearty laughs. Then he suddenly changed his mind. "Well, actually I did, when I was younger. Long enough to suck the juice out of it. In those days it was part of your credentials to have a paper route.

"Like being a traffic boy. I was never in a grammar school long enough to get the brownie points to make it." He sounded bitter. Then he laughed again, and so did Bobby. "Yeah, I *was* once. By God, I *was* a traffic boy once!"

At 11, Victor's life underwent a drastic change. "I'd been run out of Hebrew school because of the black thing. It was an uncomfortable thing."

"Why were you kicked out?" The question annoyed him.

"I wasn't kicked out. Now, don't put that down," he ordered, raising his voice. "I said it was an uncomfortable thing." He calmed down a little. "I don't even know exactly what happened. It just didn't feel right there."

He went to college on a football scholarship, he recalled, but he gave up football and dropped out. He said he didn't finish law school either. (Later I found out he'd only attended for two months.)

"I see you have a silver Cross pen," said Victor, abruptly jumping up and bounding across the room. "Look at this." He handed me a gold-plated Cross pen. "Read the inscription." It read: "Philco's Hawaii Cruise—1959."

They give those to their top salesmen," he explained proudly. "I never went on the cruise. I sold it to someone."

I asked Victor to tell me about the time he flashed on his own perfection.

"I had done all the things," he began. "Made lots of money, lived at the right suburban address, $10 haircuts, a big dog and 2.8 kids. Actually I never got the .8.

"We had built our net worth. And we felt 'Blechhh.' Nothing was shaking. I drove a new Thunderbird when what I really wanted

was an XKE. The Thunderbird cost more, but the XKE didn't fit my image."

I wanted to hear about the flash.

"Well, I sat down on the living room floor one night with Mahler on the record player. I decided that there was an answer to life that could be figured out or the question would have never been asked. So I figured the son-of-a-bitch out."

"What was the question?"

He considered it for a moment. "Given this mess that is me . . . You're not writing . . . Given this mess that is me, how can I arrange to unselfishly serve the world, and profit by it?"

"And you came up with?"

"The answer."

"Which was?"

"Uh, . . . uh, which was that I didn't have to do anything at all."

I asked him if the "answer" was what he taught in the courses at the Institute. He didn't like the question, and his tone again became hostile and suspicious. "The Institute is a place where people can come to feel that they're perfect."

"What do you teach in the courses?"

"Nothing," he said, "nothing they don't already know."

"You teach courses to people that teach them nothing?"

He straightened up and cocked his head. "It's show business, baby. That's what it really is."

"Show business?"

"Yeah, you know, like Will Rogers. He made people think."

"But you advertise courses. People must come to learn something."

"People come for all kinds of reasons. What they buy is a chance to relate to me. It's entertainment. I'm an entertainer."

"I've talked to people who call you a guru."

"No one who's part of this Institute calls me a guru," snapped Victor. "Look, baby, I tell them in the beginning of each course they're not going to learn anything they don't already know. In

all my courses I do that, and they can have their money back if they want it. It's up to them whether or not they feel they've been taken."

"But you charge money to begin with."

"Listen, baby, people can take courses free. All they have to do is ask me personally. They can write me at 1507 Purson Lane, Lafayette, California." He sputtered with laughter: "But I burn my mail! And they can call me, but I don't answer my phone!"

Victor was delighted with himself. So was Bobby.

A girl came in with a tray of warmed-up eggrolls. "Not now, baby," he said, waving her away. He hadn't even touched the last batch of food. "Later."

"I still don't understand," I persisted. "You say you don't teach people anything?"

"Look. I've explained it three times already." He had lost patience. "Bobby, what time do I have to be ready tonight?"

"Seven."

He looked at the clock. "You've got ten more minutes, baby. Any more questions?"

"Why do you call people 'baby' when they have names?"

"Because people are sometimes too dull to remember their names," he sneered. "I find you dull. I don't remember your name. You're not interesting enough."

"Don't you have any qualms about insulting people?"

"Look, baby, I tell people if I think they're dull. It's the most loving thing to do, to tell the truth. How do I know if it will hurt their feelings?"

I put my pencil and paper away. Victor changed his tone completely and looked me in the eye for the first time.

"I feel as if I haven't given you what you wanted," he said earnestly. "I would like to give you More." All of a sudden he was sounding like a pastor. "There must be something else that you want. I'd like to give it to you."

I did have other questions, but at this point it seemed useless to ask them. Instead I requested a cigarette for the road. Victor gave me the whole pack.





David Gahr

The Lyman Family's Holy Siege of America

By David Felton

"The Manson Family preached
peace and love and went around killing people.
We don't preach peace and love . . ."
—Jim Kweskin

Michael Dobo

At the south end of Boston lies the Roxbury black ghetto, a dirty oasis of trees, homes and small stores that suddenly emerges from blocks of old factories and railroad yards. Like many of our nation's famous darktowns, Roxbury includes hundreds of decaying apartment buildings housing too many people on not enough land, ruthlessly noisy elevated trains, and a sprawling, brand new, all concrete police district station.

Yet there's something different here. It can be seen from all over Boston: a tower, an ancient brick watchtower that rises needle-like from a secluded hill—Fort Hill—in the center of Roxbury. A relic from the original American Revolution, the structure stands some 70 feet above an abandoned city park. The stone tablet commemorating it is itself nearly 100 years old and starting to crumble around these words:

> On this eminence stood ROXBURY HIGH FORT, a strong earthwork planned by Henry Knox and Josiah Waters and erected by the American Army June 1775—crowning the famous Roxbury lines of investment at THE SIEGE OF BOSTON.

Five years ago a small community of young white intellectuals and artists from the Boston-Cambridge area moved onto the hill and "took over" several empty apartment houses bordering the park. Relations with the black neighborhood immediately deteriorated, and soon guards, members of the new Fort Hill Community, could be seen patrolling the fort for the first time in almost 200 years.

Since then peace has returned, relations have improved, and there is some question on a recent summer evening why guards are still needed at Fort Hill. Or who, exactly, is being watched. It's dark, about 9:30 PM, as one of them approaches holding a flashlight. He appears troubled, glancing nervously up and down a long row of houses now owned by the community. Inside the first house some 60 Fort Hill members are eating dinner, methodi-

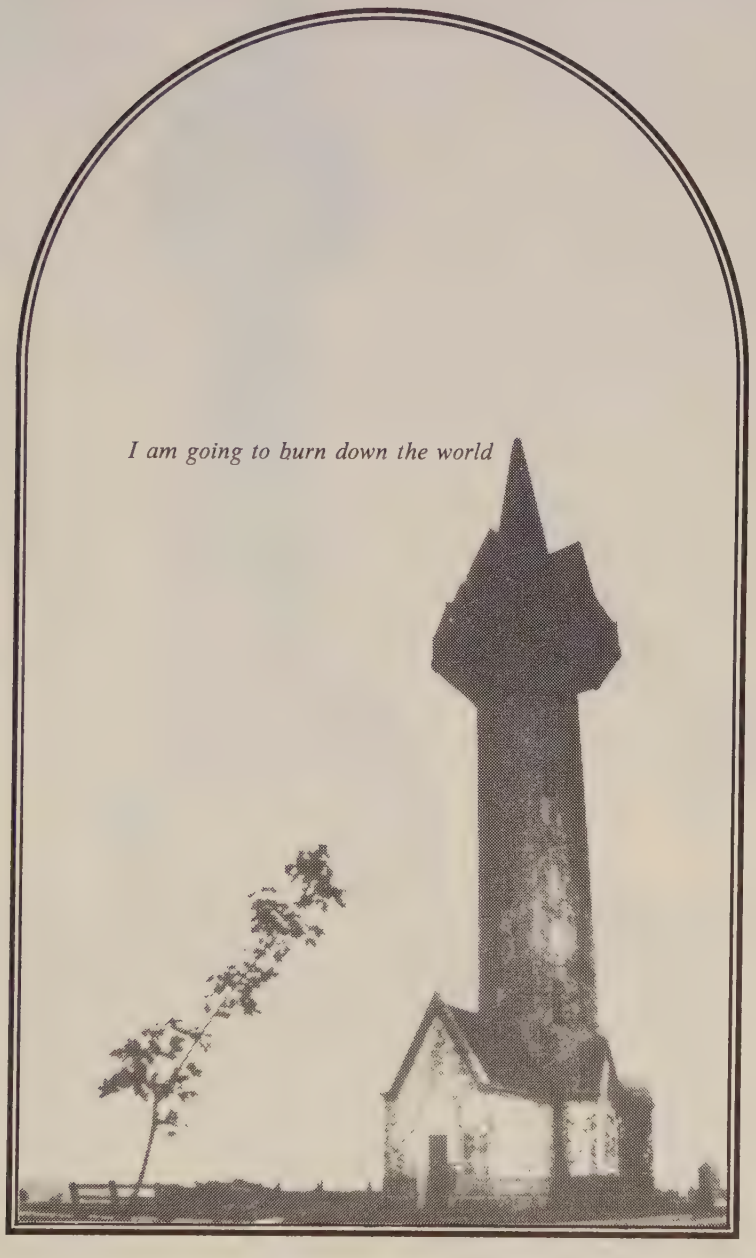
cally cleaning their plates after a 12-hour work day. Suddenly the guard turns and walks briskly to an area at the rear of the houses where garbage is dumped. He shuts off his flashlight and from a large green plastic garbage bag secretly retrieves a suitcase packed the night before. Then, without looking back, he runs as fast as he can, as fast as he's ever run, past the garages, past the basketball court, past the tool sheds, down the long dirt driveway at the rear, through the winding paved streets of the ghetto and the straight paved streets of the first factories, past the nearest subway station, where they'd be sure to check, to a second station, blocks and blocks away, more difficult to find.

As the sentry boards a subway train, safe for the moment, the interior lights reveal his panting, boyish face. He is Paul Williams, a rock author and first editor of Crawdaddy Magazine, who several months ago gave up his writing career to join the Fort Hill Community.

"I was very frightened, sure," he admitted later at his New York hideaway. "I said I was leaving the day before and they said I wouldn't be allowed to. They said they'd be watching me 24 hours a day. So I was super paranoid, super cautious. But that doesn't bother me. I mean, they owed it to me, in a sense, to keep me on the hill.

"If I grow enough, someday I may come back. I care about Mel Lyman more than anyone outside of myself; someday I may be able to care about him more than me. The people who can, have something really beautiful going."




I am going to burn down the world



I am going to tear down everything that cannot stand alone

I am going to shove hope up your ass

I am going to turn ideals to shit

I am going to reduce everything that stands to rubble
And then I am going to burn the rubble
And then I am going to scatter the ashes
And then maybe someone will be able to see something as it really is
Watch Out

—Mel Lyman

Newport Folk Festival, 1966
Mel Lyman, Marilyn Kewskin and Jim Kewskin (guitar)



Part I

What Ever Happened to Jim Kweskin?

The career of artist Bruce Conner is as unpredictable as his pioneer assemblages and films. For 15 years he has dabbled among the great and weird, the straight and near-straight around the country. He has produced light shows, played the harmonica and run for supervisor of San Francisco. Lately he has earned his living in that city as a minor box office attraction, collecting $2 a film buff at the Interplayers Cinema near Aquatic Park. Thin and scholarly in a grey business suit, Conner sorted out change during a Von Stroheim twin-bill not long ago and recalled the man who taught him to play the harp.

"I met him about 1963, '64, in Massachusetts," said Conner, handing some of his change to the popcorn lady. "I was staying at Leary's Newton Center, and Mel was one of those people who just came in and out. He was living with a bunch near Brandeis, all students and dopers. This guy in Anthropological Review had just written about morning glory seeds and how they got you stoned, and Mel was there three or four nights a week at the coffee grinder, grinding up seeds from this 500-pound bag we had in the kitchen.

"And everybody was getting fucked up. Mel just had them swallow the seeds, not soak them and everything the way it said in Anthropological Review, and all these people were falling down on their faces and hemorrhaging and falling down in the bathroom and talking about how great it was afterwards."

Conner snickered over a neatly trimmed goatee.

"I remember once, Mel called up and said, 'I got 12 people, I want to bring 'em over, we've all taken the seeds.' I said no, but he came anyway. All these people showed up and he said, 'I want to see your movies.' And I ran *A Movie.* And in the middle of it, somebody just *exploded* all over the place, threw up all over the place. And Mel thought that was great. 'It was so much for him he just had to throw it all out,' was the way he saw it." The recollection of it reduced Conner to giggles. "Of course, the ladies upstairs saw it as a bunch of vomit all over the floor."

The box office phone momentarily returned Conner to the present. "Interplayers. Right. *Fury* is running right now. It's on again at 10:30. *Greed* starts at 9:00. OK?" He hung up and continued.

"We'd talk about things. One time Mel was talking about morning glory seeds and how they put people to sleep sometimes, and I thought that was a real drag, you know. That must not really be enlightenment. And the conversation went into talk about rituals and exercise, and all of a sudden it started hinging around what is God, what is Cosmic Consciousness and everything.

"And I told Mel one of my private theories. I said that mostly what people do when they talk about God is a projection of what they think God is, and it always comes down to a projection from a person. So the best way to find out what God is is to say you're God yourself. And maybe the first way to do this was if somebody was on the phone and they said, 'Oh my God!' and then you say, 'Yes? What is it?' And you could just go on from there."

A soiled, bearded student in tattered jeans peeled off two dollars from a large roll and exchanged them for a ticket and brochure of coming attractions.

"I didn't think about it after that," said Conner. "It was just an idea—I wasn't gonna use it myself. But in retrospect, I figure Mel must have used it. This was in '63, '64."



Many of the people interviewed for this tale asked not to be identified. Therefore I have changed their names, and in some cases, their appearances and even sexual persuasions. There's a little bit of the Big Molder in each of us, isn't there? Let's call the next fellow Harry Bikes, an overstuffed man with swollen tits who now lives in Cambridge and writes for a major organ of the Establishment. He belonged to one of Mel Lyman's earliest communities—the hearty band of experimenting dealers and dopers that hung out near Brandeis College in Waltham, Massachusetts.

"I guess it was in the spring of 1963 that Mel showed up on campus," Bikes remembered. "He was living with a girl, a student named Judy Silver. At that time I assumed he was, like, from North Carolina, which he said he was, that he was a simple kind of person. This is how he was coming on—kind of Appalachian, very casual, you know. All he carried around was a simple army jacket with a lot of pockets for his harps. And he had his banjo.

"Later it turned out he wasn't from North Carolina at all. He was from Oregon or someplace and he'd been to Junior College, and he was a lot more sophisticated than he was letting on."

Bikes sat back expansively in his basement apartment. As he spoke he had a habit of fondling himself, scratching his T-shirted belly or tugging at a tiny black goatee-within-a-goatee that hung from his lower lip.

"We were all living in this house on Hartwell Street, called Hartwell House, and we were all very tripped out. I mean really, really wasted, totally stoned. Three teaspoons of morning glory seeds is roughly equivalent to 500 micrograms of LSD, a very strong trip. I remember I painted the living room with a nine-foot-high Yin/Yang, and the thing would roll out at me like a ball of fire, then turn around and recede until it was a pinpoint and I thought it was going to disappear in the wall. That's how tripped out we were.

"We got caught up in Leary's thing and got very spaced out, and something very weird happened to Mel. Like he would say to people, he'd give them acid or morning glory seeds, and he'd

say, 'Get stoned, wait five hours, then come talk to me,' that kind of thing. There were a lot of subtle little power relationships."

"Power relationships?"

"He had a kind of insidious way of getting into people. He had a tremendous understanding of character, and he knew how to extract pain. Mel was very big on pain and suffering and loyalty.

"Like I was bucking Mel's authority so he painted over all my murals one night. I mean, that really hurt me when he did that. And the next day I asked him why he did it and he said he wanted me to experience pain."

Also there was this crafty, stubborn quality about him, said Bikes. "We had this landlord who was going to evict us. Somebody had bought the house, some developer. Everybody split, but Mel stayed there for months. *Months.* Like the guy went to court with him, took the plumbing out, took the gas out, took the electricity out, and Mel just wouldn't leave. They were sawing the roof off of him and had the house boarded up, and Mel would come home at night and rip the boards off—just purely out of *resistance.* If you excited his interest in that sense, or if you tried to resist him or overwhelm him, he could be *devilish,* just absolutely *devilish.*

"He had a willingness to cope, you know, that made a lot of people feel important. Very strange kinds of people. Let's say someone that I would consider a *nerd*, he would take interest in—if they came to him in a suppliant manner. And I guess that's what the appeal was. He had a way of elevating the humble and humbling the elevated."

The more deeply his story developed, the more Bikes appeared to enjoy telling it, embellishing it with smug grins, high-pitched laughs, scratches, goatee tugs and pregnant pauses, as if he had told it many times before. Though he called himself one of Mel's antagonists, he seemed curiously enthralled by these memories.

"Signals were going out," continued Bikes, his eyes wide and gleaming. "When Mel left North Carolina he sent Sophie, his first wife, back to the West Coast. And later he sent his best friend, Eben Given, out to Sophie, and they lived together a number of

years. And Mel would be sitting at the kitchen table writing 15-page letters to Sophie and to different people in North Carolina. He had a weird network of people all over the country that he had these very deep personal exchanges with.

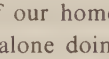
"Then Judy got all fucked up—this is his second old lady—I mean like she got really twisted. I don't know if it was the acid or the scene or whatever, but she split. She went back to Kansas. She was totally out of the picture by the summer of 1963.

"Judy is probably the most important thing in Mel's life. He worshipped Judy, really loved her. Then she split, you know? She couldn't help it, she was totally freaked out. They took her away."



"*Late May, 1963, 43 Charles Street, Waltham, Mass.* Hard times. I am lower than I've ever been in my life . . . Judy and I were so happy and wanted a baby and so I gave her one for us and she was afraid and I tried to comfort her and she wanted an abortion and I begged her to see the natural cycle through and she had an abortion and I cried and went away and traveled and was very unhappy and then I got busted and Judy bailed me out and now we are back together and Judy is flunking out of school for good and is such a frightened little girl and has never had hardships and is weak and afraid and frantically searching for something valid and good in the world to cling to and forget herself through and so she runs in and out of our home, takes long drives alone, sits around almost dead and I sit alone doing my time ahead of time and I can't reach her as she's almost catatonic . . ."

—Mel Lyman in his new book, 'Mirror at the End of the Road,' published by American Avatar and dedicated "To Judy, who made me live with a broken heart."



By this time Boston, particularly the Club 47 in Cambridge, had become the center of the American folkie movement. Located at 47 Mt. Auburn Street—Harvard's main drag—the modest storefront coffee house attracted national attention in the late Fifties with the debut of a cantankerous dropout from Boston University named Joan Baez.

Soon students from Harvard, Radcliffe, Brandeis, Tufts, Boston College and Boston University were crowding in to boost local singers like Jackie Washington, Tom Rush, the Charles River Valley Boys, Geoff Muldaur and Jim Kweskin. In 1963 the Club 47 moved four blocks away to 47 Palmer Street, a slightly swankier, brick and glass basement, and started importing talent—Dave Van Ronk from New York, Muddy Waters and Paul Butterfield from Chicago and Doc Watson from Deep Gap, North Carolina.

Locally, however, Jim Kweskin, having formed his Jug Band with Geoff Muldaur, Fritz Richmond, Bruno Wolf and Bob Siggins, had become the biggest draw.

"It was a time of candles jammed into wine bottles," recalled one veteran. The music had an academic, even snob appeal, with fanatic traditionalists jamming into Harvard Square to compare notes. It was a period of revival. The Charles River Valley Boys were popularizing bluegrass. Jim Kweskin was bringing back jug band music, whatever that was.

Later the revival abruptly ended, rather rudely for some enthusiasts, at the Newport Folk Festival of 1965. A sense of betrayal was in the air after Bob Dylan, who had, after all, helped start the whole thing, got up and sang music that was clearly more rock than folk.

After Judy Silver went back to Kansas in 1963, Mel Lyman, who had been taught the mysteries of the banjo by Obray Ramsey in North Carolina, was hired by Jim Kweskin to play rhythm banjo. The choice was not entirely Mel's. He had been sentenced to either a job or jail after he was busted on dope in Tallahassee.

One fan of the period remembers Melvin as a short, thin man who wore suspenders, played the harp and was extremely confident and poised. That's what he remembers—how poised he was, as if he had been playing with the band for years.

"He became very much the spiritual focus of the band," recalled Harry Bikes. "And Kweskin totally fell under Mel's cloud. It made for a lot of conflicts in the band, needless to say. Mel would get like very moody. Sometimes he'd play and sometimes he

wouldn't—very weird. He had a way of dramatizing his presence or his feeling. He'd be up on the stand at the Club 47, and he would just say, 'Well, I'm not into it.' And that would be *pregnant* with meaning, you know? And we would like grope to understand the *significance* of why he's not into it."

In the next year or so, Mel continued to write letters and gradually began drawing his "weird network of people" closer to him.

"Mel brought his family in from the West Coast and they settled on River Street in Cambridge. Sophie and Eben and Mel began, like, gathering people. Signals were going out.

"And Kweskin was dealing. Kweskin was a pretty heavy dealer—top quality 'A' reefer, strictly grass. Then Jim had a really bad experience. He went to New York to pick up some grass, and some people ripped him off. They bashed him over the head with a brick—he was almost killed. It was a very traumatic experience for him, really turned his head around about a lot of things. This was in '65. I don't think he ever dealt after that again. It seemed to be a turning point in his life and, I would say from a distance, the Jug Band's life."



Longtime friends of Jim Kweskin must surely be puzzled by his latest album, released just this month by Warner/Reprise. Not only is it the first new Kweskin music recorded in several years, it represents a final reversal of authority begun in 1963 when Jim and Mel first appeared at the Club 47 (a pattern of "spiritual infiltration" that is repeated in nearly every Lyman Family enterprise).

The title hints at it: "Richard D. Herbruck Presents *Jim Kweskin's America*—co-starring Mel Lyman and the Lyman Family." Giving co-star billing to someone who, by *conventional* definition, plays a back role is unusually charitable, to say the least.

But it goes further than that. Here's what Kewskin writes in his section of the liner notes:

"The soul that is born in Cancer must always find its completion

in Aries, when God and man become one. You can read the story of it in *Mirror at the End of the Road* by Mel Lyman. It is the story of life from the moment it doubts itself and receives its first intimations of immortality to the time it becomes God . . . as it grows from Cancer to Aries. You can hear that story in this album if you will step aside and let your soul listen.

"I am singing America to you and it is Mel Lyman. He is the new soul of the world."

That's right, Jim's a Cancer, Mel's an Aries.

It is clear, from the notes, from the music inside, from the album cover, that *Jim Kewskin's America* is actually *Mel Lyman's America.* Particularly from the cover. This grotesquely crude collage, prepared by a member of the Lyman Family, includes many of Mel's fondest American heroes—Abraham Lincoln, James Dean, Matt Dillon as played by Jim Arness, John Kennedy, Jimmie Rogers, Vince Lombardi, Henry Miller, Marlon Brando, Woody Guthrie, Gene Autry, Henry Fonda, Louis Armstrong and Superman, men often chosen for their astrological signs as much as anything else. For instance, Kweskin writes in his notes, "At every turning point in the life of America a Cancer has stood up to sing a new soul as it flowed into the old and transformed it. Stephen Foster, George M. Cohan, Louis Armstrong, Woody Guthrie, Jessie Benton . . ."

Jessie Benton? She's one of Mel's earlier old ladies and the daughter of painter Thomas Hart Benton, whose aging beady-eyed face can be seen at the very top of the album cover. He's very important to the Lyman Family, sort of the benefactor. Not only did he give them Jessie, but many of his original works and two summer retreat houses at Martha's Vineyard, where Mel takes certain followers to train as leaders.

The cover also includes one picture of Jim and two of Mel. And, perhaps most revealing, a photograph of the Royal Inn Hotel in San Francisco where a room was reserved during the recording of the album. That room, on the top floor, is circled in black. Mel Lyman slept there.

The album raises some other questions. Like, will an audience

partial to the lively, carefree "fun music" of the old Jug Band readily adapt to an eight-minute version of "Old Rugged Cross" or a seven-minute version of "Old Black Joe"?

And who is Richard Herbruck, the mysterious "Great Producer" who presented, in addition to the album, a program on KPFK-FM in Los Angeles last spring that ended in a violent confrontation with crowbars and police? His identity will be discussed later; for now it's interesting enough to know that Warner Brothers hasn't the foggiest idea of who he is.



"At one point I needed a banjo player in the band. So this friend of mine said he knew this guy who was playing banjo out at Brandeis University. He brought him in, and it was Mel. And that was the beginning of . . ." Jim Kweskin giggles at the thought of it all. ". . . the beginning of the change of my entire life."

Kweskin's dark moustache is shorter than it used to be, trimmed almost to Hitlerian proportions; but otherwise Kweskin, during a recent interview, looked about the same as he always has—gaunt and handsome with curly black hair and intense eyes of still, deep water. His manner was polite but cold, almost antiseptic.

"I knew immediately that he was a whole different kind of person than I had ever met," he continued, "the things he said and the things he did and the way he played. And his timing. Things would happen to him that could never happen to anybody else. I began to realize he never made a telephone call when the line was busy, he never called anybody and they weren't home. Or he would wake up in the morning and talk about somebody he hadn't seen in two years, and he'd walk out down the street and run into them. Things like that happening, you know? And you'd say it was a coincidence—maybe once or twice—but it happened every day. It was like some kind of miracle every day."

Finally Kweskin realized that without Mel the band didn't mean a damn thing to him. "I'll tell you how it happened. I did a TV show with the Jug Band, the Jonathan Winters Show; this was

in '68. And it was really corny. We put on costumes, we were trying to make it big in the music business. I saw that show, and I mean we really stunk. It was everything that I ever didn't want to be.

"And very close to that time, a few weeks later, I saw a little show on Channel 2, the educational channel in Boston, called *What's Happening Mr. Silver?*, the David Silver show. And all it was was an interview with Mel. The technique was poor, the camera work wasn't good, nothing was. And this little show moved me so deeply, just Mel's presence on TV was so strong and so alive, that I realized everything I was doing was a waste of time. What I really ought to be doing was helping to get Mel more opportunities to be on TV and to have his writing and his music and whatever he created out to the public.

"I'd been fighting with him inside of myself for almost a year, but it was that show that was the turning point. All of a sudden I knew that nothing else was important except that the whole world had to see Mel Lyman."

To join the service of Mel, Jim said he had to give up his career, his possessions and his music. "I had to start right down at the very basis and bottom of hard work. I had no authority. I had no position. I wasn't anything except one of the guys who worked on the construction of the houses. That's where it starts, just like boot camp.

"You get constantly stripped of everything that's a lie in your life, of every illusion you have about yourself. It gets constantly stripped away till finally you're left with absolutely nothing but the *real, barest you.* And that's what happened to me over the last three years. I was in like, musically, what you'd call retirement for three years.

"And now, just about six months ago, I decided to go out in the world again and build up a new career as a solo entertainer. I was born to go out into the public. I knew that before I met Mel Lyman, I just didn't know why. And it was living with and having Mel inside me that showed me why."

"Inside you?"

"Yeah, the music that comes from me now comes from much deeper, deeper inside me. And therefore it affects people in a much deeper way. The things that happen in the room, you know? If it gets to the point where I want it to get to, the whole room comes together. I mean, the audience and myself and everybody is doing the same thing at the same time, and you can just feel the spirit in the room. And that's something that I could never do if I didn't have Mel Lyman inside me."

I asked Jim what his new act was like. Did he sermonize or what?

"We don't sermonize; I don't know, we don't preach," he said, barely smiling. "But we don't always do what they *think* they want. I mean, we demand that the audience get personally involved in what's happening, and a lot of times they just don't want to. Sometimes it's a simple thing like having them sing along. Or other times it's having some sort of personal input, get them to talk a bit, or say something or do something."

"And if they don't?"

"Well, we demand it."

"Do you quit playing, or . . ."

"Sometimes. We've been known to sit up on stage for hours and not do a thing. And maybe we'd get everybody to hate us." Kweskin started to laugh, as if specific incidents were in mind. "It's awful. But out of that thing sometimes very great music comes. Sometimes you have to create an embarrassing or painful or angry situation just so that everybody's in the same place at the same time."

Wasn't this the sort of intimidation, I asked him, that people often associated with the Jesus freaks? Maybe he didn't understand the question.

"Peace and love!" he said scornfully. "It's just so limiting, it's ridiculous. It's denying 75 percent of human nature. I mean, I walk down the street and I talk to some of the Jesus freaks or some of the peace and love people, you know? And they're dead.

They're sound asleep. They feel absolutely nothing. All they do is spout out words. I mean, it's obvious we're not spouting out a bunch of words that somebody taught us how to say."

Kweskin started to shout in fervent, rhythmic patterns, as if he had a running jump and was sliding in with each phrase. "That's what we're on this planet for, to make people *realize* that it isn't all the same. That's why we make films and make music, to *educate* these people. Of course, there are millions of non-believers, there are millions of uneducated people, there's millions of people who don't know the difference. And our whole purpose in life is to *show* them the difference, to *make* them *feel* the difference.

"Here, just listen to this." Kweskin withdrew a manuscript from his briefcase and, with a slight missionary tremble to his voice, started reading it word for word. It was Mel Lyman's "Plea for Courage," an essay the community apparently feels is one of his most important.

" 'We should be entering the new world,' " Kweskin began, " 'all the preparations have been made, it has all been written about and everybody wants it, it is so easy to imagine.' "

But, of course, we're not entering the new world, says Mel, because all you hippies out there are sitting around in a drugged Utopian stupor instead of getting off your asses and organized.

" '. . . you're all too full of dope and pride and ideas and yourselves to know what's even good for you anymore . . . I really hate you bastards cause you're killing me, you're stinking up the whole world with your filthy hair and dirty clothes and empty slogans . . . why don't you kill yourself?' "

Basically the 1200-word essay, which has been reprinted free in several underground publications, is an attack on the kind of weekend hippies that hung out in the Haight in 1966, about the time Mel started cutting his hair.

" 'The few who know our deepest needs are still unfulfilled are regarded with great suspicion and contempt for not allowing people to "do their own thing." I don't want you to do your own thing, I want you to do *my* thing, *wake up!* . . .

" 'The same dollar that we set out to stamp out has stamped *us* out and we never even realized it. . . .' "

And Mel's solution? " 'Get together with your friends, pool your resources, make some money, buy a house, take on some responsibilities . . . *we must get together and fight this creeping decay!*' "

Jim took a breath and replaced the manuscript. "That's why we moved to the West Coast," he said, "the need to expand, the fact that Los Angeles in one sense is the film and communications capital. We want to, slowly, as much as we can, get involved with the media.

"There's a whole community of, well, what used to be called hippies—I don't know what they are now—but there's thousands of them out here who are, you know, just waiting for Mel Lyman. He's like the rock that's dropped into the pond, he's going to have more communities. He's going to have hundreds of communities. Before you know it, the whole world's going to be his community."



Part II
War Games at Bootcamp Melvin

Being the Incredible History of the Boston Avatar, a Story of Conspiracy and Corporate Intrigue, Internal Subversion, Violence and Theft, and Mysterious Control, All at the Hands of One Man (Was He Just a Man?) Who Was Never Even There

"It took me a long time to understand that Avatar was not a collective term but an individual term. In other words, not *Avatar*, but *the* Avatar."
—Harry Bikes

How does a poor, simple American boy with a police record and a distaste for steady work come to acquire, in five years, more than a dozen elegant homes in four major cities, a fleet of cars and trucks to service them, recording

and film equipment worth tens of thousands of dollars, and retreat houses in Martha's Vineyard and estates in Provence, France, near the Riviera?

That, on the surface at least, is the history of United Illuminating Inc., the Lyman Family's corporate front. Today United Illuminating owns eight multistoried old homes at Fort Hill in Boston, owns a five-story brownstone and leases a loft in New York City, leases a posh hillside duplex in the Buena Vista area overlooking San Francisco, and owns two houses in Los Angeles, one of them the Hollywood Hills mansion of late industrialist George Eastman which they purchased "at a steal" for $160,000.

To pay the mortgages and rent, plus ample bills for food, utilities and maintenance, many of the community's 100-odd members hold regular jobs in the outside world—anything from waiting on tables to designing or remodeling buildings—turning over all pay "except carfare" to United Illuminating. Then there are the superstar incomes, the bread from Jim Kweskin and from Mark Frechette, the hero of *Zabriskie Point* who everyone is hoping will soon be discovered again for another acting assignment. Further, a surprising number of members come from wealthy and prominent families, for whatever that's worth.

Nowadays the Lyman people can afford to purchase their elegance more or less pre-packaged, as they did in their recent West Coast acquisitions. But in the past that elegance came hand-made, by their own, disciplined hands. When Mel Lyman and his small band of friends moved to Fort Hill in 1966, they moved into squalor. Fort Avenue Terrace, which skirted the base of the historic watchtower, was like a ghost street. The rotting structures there were without heat, light, plumbing or paint; they were uninhabitable, according to any but the most desperate hippie standards, and in fact had not been lived in for years.

Bought as shells for small sums, each today would bring $40 grand upward but for their ghetto location. They are models of warmth, taste, innovation and craftsmanship. In keeping with Mel's master bootcamp building and training plan, they have been

stripped to the studs and rafters and entirely rebuilt, in some cases stripped and rebuilt again after Mel discovered a "mistake."

The Fort Hill Community in those early days was a rough life, and one wonders why Mel Lyman chose it. There is little indication he envisioned at that time the size and purpose of the community to come. True, he had already experienced several intimations of his own immortality. At the Newport Folk Festival of 1965, his last appearance with Jim Kweskin's Jug Band, Mel got a special request from God for a solo harp version of "Rock of Ages." At first Mel tried to resist the vision but finally gave in (". . . like what Christ had to do before mounting the cross, he said not my will but thine be done and then there was no cross, no death . . .") and played the hymn for a soulful, trembling ten minutes. It followed the festival's final act, and most of the fans had already left for their cars.

Soon afterward Mel wrote his first book, a rambling, abstract, 80-page riddle called *Autobiography of a World Savior*, based loosely on the Superman-Krypton plot ("Long long ago in another dimension on another planet I volunteered for an assignment the nature of which I knew little . . ."). Some people, including rock writer Paul Williams, have made their Decision for Mel based on that book alone, even though Mel later described it as a private, tongue-in-cheek joke written for some Scientologist friends of his.

Why, then, the move to Roxbury? For some time Mel had been hanging out with the film freak crowd at Max's Kansas City, in much the same way he had hung out with Bruce Conner and the others at Leary's place; in fact, he briefly went with Vivian Kurz, one of Warhol's lovelies, and Jonas Mekas helped publish his *Autobiography.* Mel, therefore, was getting itchy to create. He was developing certain theories, some his own, about music and art, and he needed room to work.

David Gude, a folksinger and tape editor at Vanguard Records whose faith in Mel eventually led to his dismissal, explained it like this:

"I couldn't appreciate Mel's music until he told me a little about

it, you know? And then when I listened to it with that understanding, it was really a miracle. Mel said that so much music is rehearsed, today especially, just rehearsed to death so you never really hear anything original.

"But Mel said a lot of great records have been made and these great moments happen all the time. He said he wanted to make this the rule instead of the exception. He wanted to set up a situation where this would happen every time.

"In other words, you get a bunch of musicians in there, if you get a great piece of music, it's usually innocent. I was going to say "by accident," but a better word would be that it happens *innocently.* And Mel wanted to create a situation where it could be done *consciously.*"

It sounded like a contradiction.

"It is," said Gude. "It is completely. It's almost impossible. How can a person create innocently and yet set out to do just that? The only way is if he can somehow tune in on the spirit, an inspirational spirit, you know? In other words, if he can all of a sudden make himself inspired, or, *if he lives in a place of truth all the time.*"



Among the very first members of the Fort Hill Community were three couples: Mel Lyman and Jessie Benton, former wife of David Gude; Mel's artist friend Eben Given and Sophie Lucero, former wife of Mel Lyman; and David Gude and Faith Franckenstein, daughter of novelist Kay Boyle. (These three marriages, too, have long since dissolved.) Also Faith's brother, Ian, other friends, some children and one grandmother—Kay Boyle herself.

"It was when my ex-son-in-law David Gude left Vanguard Records that I first heard of Mel Lyman," Kay recalled as she sat in the living room of the Victorian San Francisco home she has owned for many years. "And then when I went up there in '66 I met him for the first time. He was, I felt, very insignificant looking and very weak looking. He never at any time tried to talk

with me; I was completely ignored by him.

"My daughter and David said they had a room for me, they wanted me to come and live there, you know? Their idea was that I would make my life there and eventually sell this house. *Then* there was not the idea of spreading out as they have now."

A radiant, grey-haired woman of amazing graciousness, Kay Boyle spoke in a calm manner that intimated little of her five-year battle with Mel Lyman over possession of Faith and Ian. That battle, at least in Faith's case, she has probably lost for good.

"I took a job with the University of Massachusetts in Amherst for a year, and drove over from the commune. And even before certain confrontations came up with some people at Fort Hill, life became impossible. For instance, underneath my room David would record all night with Mel, right underneath, you see. And I thought, 'Well, I'll get used to it, it doesn't really matter. One of the little grandchildren had his crib in my room. I thought, 'We'll get used to it.'

"But then David would say to me in the morning, 'I hope we kept you awake last night. That was the intention, we didn't *have* to do that.' "

"Why did they?"

"To make me realize what reality was or something, I don't know.

"I think there were not more than 30 people living there then, and there was a great turnover. At the beginning, I believe, it was considered a place where people could go and get drugs. I would come down sometimes in the morning and there would be about 20 people rolled up in blankets asleep on the floor. And I'd pick my way over to the kitchen to help Faith get breakfast, and I'd say, 'Who are they?' and she'd say, 'I have no idea.' The door was open and they'd just come in.

"I think Mel, as time wore on, got much more strict about things, and discipline. I suppose he had not developed his pitch to the point that he has now. And, I don't know, I think more recently the notoriety of Manson had an effect on him. I think he saw

even greater dimensions that he might rise to in some way.

"When I went back there last summer, I was astounded to see Manson's photograph in the children's playroom. And I asked Faith if they thought he was innocent and she said, 'It doesn't matter. He made a gesture against all the things we do not believe in.' Which is a very distorted point of view, I would say. To say the least.

"They change the flowers under Manson's photograph daily—that's what I was told by one of the girls."

Kay had mentioned certain confrontations. Like what?

"I once got into a fight with Howard Kilby. Howard was a strange fellow, from the Bible Belt. His mother used to send him little sermons each week. Anyway, I went up there about 6:30 one morning, it was two below zero or something, and the heat had gone off in the house. I went up to my grandchildren's bedroom and they were lying literally blue with cold, absolutely freezing. And I took them down and sat them in front of the oven and started getting breakfast ready.

"And Howard breezed in. Faith had said to me, 'Howard comes in every morning early and takes butter, bread, stuff like that, out of the icebox for his lunch. Don't let him.' But I wasn't in any mood to fight then. I said, 'Look at these poor kids. Look at them. The heat's gone off.'

"And Howard was helping himself to butter, and he said, '*Beautiful.*' " Kay's voice assumed a mocking high pitch. " 'It's just *beautiful* to see children cold like that. Children should be cold and hungry all the time—then they're close to *reality.*'

"I was so furious. I blew up. I said, 'God, I've never known such hatred, real hatred, in people as on this hill!' "



"Once the basic requirements of survival had been met we were able to devote some time to other things. We no longer filled our spare time talking to each other because we no longer had anything to talk about. We wanted to make new friends, we wanted to share what we had. We

had something good and something can only stay good if it is shared. And so we created a newspaper called Avatar and with it we reached out and made a lot of new friends." —*Mel Lyman*

"So I guess this takes us to . . . July 9th, 1967." Harry Bikes rocked back in his chair, his face gloating with implication. "And there begins the sordid tale of Avatar.

"It took me a long time to understand that Avatar was not a collective term but an individual one. In other words, not *Avatar*, but *the* Avatar. Understand?"

From another room in the basement, some somber Gil Evans on jazz FM added to the late evening weirdness.

"There were essentially three groups of people. There were some people in Cambridge, some people in the South End and some people on Fort Hill. And these three groups kind of got together. It was one of those things—the beginning of smoke-ins, you know, the new culture—and everybody had to have an underground paper. But nobody knew how to do a paper, right? So they went to Dave Wilson, who was the editor of Broadside, and Dave offered them his facilities at 145 Columbia Street, the Broadside office.

"They had three editors. They were trying to set it up to represent a lot of different people."

"Mel himself was not an editor?"

Bikes scoffed. "Mel *never* set foot in the Avatar office at any time. It was always remote control. Always."



Broadside is now defunct, but its former editor, Dave Wilson, appears at 36 to be alive and jovial as ever. He still has the office at 145 Columbia Street, Cambridge, from which he helps run Riverboat Enterprises, a record distributing firm specializing in old blues and folk. He is also marketing a videotape version of Broadside.

"The name Avatar," said Dave, "was a Hill suggestion. We felt it had a nice spiritual meaning and embodied our concept of the paper as a sort of hip Christian Science Monitor, one which would speak fairly and openly but with some sort of higher spiritual feeling.

"A seven-man board of directors was set up that included three people from Fort Hill, myself, and three other people. And there were three editors—myself, Lew Crampton and Wayne Hansen."

Hansen was from Fort Hill, and Crampton, active in local Boston politics, soon turned out to be a Fort Hill sympathizer.

"We really didn't understand what the Fort Hill Community was all about," said Wilson, shrugging. "Lew was a graduate student of Harvard, on the National Board of US-China Relations, you know? Wayne seemed to be a very reasonable cat. Well, it didn't take long for the shit to hit the fan."

No longer than it took the first issue to hit the stands. By and large the 16-page edition was a good representation of the underground press at that time—some suitably cryptic psychedelic art by Eben Given and a fellow named Ed Beardsley, a column on astrology in the Aquarian Age, a column on legal rights, and a column on dope. Dave Wilson wrote the first of a regular series of columns on fucking.

But there was one column, "To All Who Would Know" by Mel Lyman, that must have caught a few readers off guard. For one thing, it was the only column to take up a whole page, It didn't really need a whole page, it was just printed larger and had a nice white frame around it.

And it said the darndest thing: "To those of you who are unfamiliar with me let me introduce myself by saying that I am not a man, not a personality, not a tormented struggling individual. I am all those things but much more. I am the truth and I speak the truth. . . ."In all humility I tell you that I am the greatest man in the world and it doesn't trouble me in the least."

But something did trouble Lyman as he read his own writing in print. What was wrong with line ten? Shit, some careless, inhuman hippie mother-fucker had dropped a phrase. Where it read, "The rest of you might just as well pass because I am going to attack everything you believe in . . ." it was supposed to read, "The rest of you might just as well pass *right now and write me off as an egomaniac, a madman, a self-centered schmuck* because I am going

to attack everything you believe in . . ." Someone, Mel decided, should be taught a lesson.

"Now Mel's writing was nothing to jump up and down about," recalled Wilson, "so you can imagine how I felt when Wayne Hansen came in and said, 'Mel demands that his article be reprinted in its entirety in the next issue.' He said it was a disciplinary action, that Mel said we must strive for perfection.

"Lew sort of sat on the fence. My attitude was, bullshit, if he's that offended, we'll print a correction, that's all. See, at that time I didn't understand I was dealing with *God's will.*

"Anyway, the three of us voted and it was two to one in favor of reprinting the whole thing. Which we did." All 51 lines. Correction, 52. It was printed a third time, incidentally, in issue 22.

After the first issue, said Dave, things got heavier and heavier. "The problem at this point was that the Fort Hill Community was highly organized and the rest of us weren't. The office was getting flooded with Fort Hill people; they were dedicated but they were pushing people aside.

"All of a sudden the paper didn't resemble what is was supposed to at all. We'd have these editorial meetings, and later, articles we'd agreed upon would not appear; new articles would be in their place. My copy was often conveniently lost."

After five issues of the biweekly paper, Dave Wilson was asked to resign by the Fort Hill people. They had already made it easy for him to accept the idea; by this time the editorial content was almost entirely under their control. Mel Lyman now had two pages devoted to himself—his "To All Who Would Know" column and a fan page called "Letters to Mel." Large photographs of him were starting to creep in, and other Fort Hill writers were plugging him in their columns.

Scheduled for issue six were two more items that must have offended Dave's journalistic tastes—a long, centerspread interview with Mel by a local talk show host, and a new Lyman column of short, emotionally charged thoughts called "Diary of a Young Artist":

I sit here looking so cool and calm and blowing smoke rings when actually I'm so frantic my big guts are eating up my little guts and I want to go raving mad and scream and tear my hair and shit on the floor and rub my face in it and jack off on the wall and rub my hair in it and tear off my leg and suck the bloody stump and flop around like a fish out of water and fuck myself into a coma and twist myself into a knot and spin around the world. But why will they say that I am mad?

The introduction to Mel's interview in issue six hints at the audacity of the Hill people, officially incorporated as United Illuminating, in their fight with Trust Incorporated, the bonafide Avatar publishers:

"For the purpose of simplification, United Illuminating, not Trust Incorporated, was more or less represented as publisher of Avatar, and while many consider themselves a part of both groups, those who do not have asked us to make that distinction here . . ."

So Dave Wilson quit. "But I was still on the board of directors," he remembered, "we still had a four-to-three majority; and at that point a lot of people were getting bullshit from the Hill people. So we called a board meeting, and the four of us decided, all right, no more Mel Lyman in the paper." They voted to reestablish the original lines of authority, thus effectively ousting the Fort Hill volunteers from the office.

It was a close victory, and people felt uneasy when they separated that evening. And for good reason. Dave was about to receive his first real dose of Melvin's manipulative power.

"The next day the Hill people returned and, to our surprise, completely capitulated," he said. "They agreed to all our terms. It was great. We were so overwhelmed by our new feeling of brotherhood that we immediately elected three new persons to the board."

Two of the three, it turned out, were secretly aligned with Fort Hill. And one of them, Brian Keating, had risen to the rank of editor by issue number seven.



"While we were all on brown rice," said Harry Bikes, who continued working for the Avatar after Dave Wilson split, "Mel was out buying camera equipment. You know, he had Bolexes with telephoto lenses and all this fucking sound equipment. They were milking the paper. His people opened the mail, and money filtered out to Fort Hill. Like they'd send down some new guy to the office, some really dedicated office worker, and pretty soon he'd be taking the petty change. These guys were easy to expose, and as soon as they were exposed, they'd evaporate. But as soon as they'd evaporate, another would come to take their place.

UNCLASSIFIED

Mel Lyman is UnHappy. Why? Because he has no film to make movies. Make Mel Happy by sending money to Mel Lyman c/o United Illuminating Avatar Box 1, 145 Columbia St. Cambridge Massachusetts 02139. Please hurry I can't stand to hear him cry.

AVATAR

"The money coming out of the paper was going directly to Mel—the money the street sellers brought in, the money from advertising, the subscription money. But we were given not a cent, we were given a bunch of papers to sell. We were really living in incredible squalor while the Fort Hill executives were going back and forth to New York and they had cars and everything, you know? We were the suffering capitalists and they were the prosperous communists."

The Avatar was prospering, that's for sure. Circulation was building, there were more pages and more ads. And, of course, more Mel. By issue 11 there were two full pages of Letters to Mel (three full pages by issue 17). He was writing two additional columns, "Essay on the New Age" and "Telling It Like It Is," plus bunches of random truths and poems used more or less as fillers.

As it intensified, the Fort Hill influence became personal to the point of obscurity. Many of the Lyman people were getting their

pictures and private thoughts into the paper. The work of one girl, a former mental patient named Melinda Cohan, was particularly arresting:

Laugh and kill, laugh and kill
play and work then laugh and kill.
On a cold and sunny day take a friend out far away
take him where the fields are turning
light a match and set them burning
tie him to a log to die
smile so he will wonder why
drive back home and go to bed
dream about your friend that's dead.

At the same time, the paper was covering hard news in a much more determined and relevant fashion, devoting full, well-designed pages to local politics, the Resistance and the struggle for black identity. And the Avatar was making news. With issue 11 came the first busts. Peddlers all around Boston were getting hauled off for obscenity and selling without a permit. Local courts were convicting them on obscenity charges.

To his credit, Mel Lyman, who by this time was listed in the staff box as Warlock in Residence, decided to fight the censors with all the power of his devilish wrath.

"There are a bunch of dirty cocksuckers down in Cambridge who are giving us a hard time about our goddamn paper," he wrote on page three of issue 12. "Well, fuck 'em, if they don't like it they can shove it up their fucking asses . . . imagine the nerve of those guys, I'll bet they eat pussy . . . I'm warning you guys, if you don't lay off I'm gonna smear your filthy sex starved faces all over the Boston area, I'm gonna draw pictures of you all fucking each other in the ass and sucking each other's cocks and I'll have you doing things so terrible you'll wish you never heard of the Avatar . . . I'll rent a goddamn airplane and drop them all over the whole goddamn motherfucking state. This is just a polite warning, you're playing with dynamite, don't fuck with me . . ."

Which prompted this Letter to Mel in the following issue:

"Regarding page three, your No. 12 issue: I agree almost wholeheartedly with Mr. Mel Lyman's creed. However, I take exception to one point: Mr. Lyman, what's so wrong with eating pussy?—J.F.D., Beacon Hill."

To further provoke the authorities, Mel devoted the entire centerfold of issue 13 to four words drawn three inches high by Eben Given: FUCK SHIT PISS CUNT.

Eventually, with the help of Boston attorney Joseph Oteri, the convictions were overturned, but long after the Avatar had attracted support from fighting liberals around the country. And many new subscribers.

But the fight between Mel and City Hall was a mild, gentlemanly affair compared to the one brewing between Mel and the so-called "downhill scoffers" who were still officially running the paper.

"By this time we were getting very ambitious," said Harry Bikes. "We had composing machines, we were getting a Telex. We had a solid readership of 35,000 per issue, big advertisers were getting interested. There were actually two Avatars—a Boston Avatar and a New York Avatar. There was a hell of a potential there.

"The Boston Avatar, starting with issue number 18, was coming out in two sections. There was a full-sized outer paper, which was primarily the newspaper. And there was a tabloid insert, which was the Mel paper. The news section was done down at the plebeian office, and the Mel section was edited and designed on Fort Hill, really in Mel's kitchen.

"The Mel insert was beautifully designed and very spacey, a lot of graphics and white space. And, needless to say, lots of pictures of Mel."

"Nobody objected to that?"

"Of course we objected. I mean, when you get 17 pictures of Mel in one issue . . . but what could we do? It was the only paper, you know? So there was a struggle building."

Then, as Bikes put it, the "religious war" started. "Mel withdrew his favor, more or less announced that that was it. And a lot of

people felt, of course, that that wasn't it, that it should continue. And incredible battles started, to the point of fist fights. Fort Hill came down and they cleared out all the equipment, the composing machines, all the records and files. They took them up to the Hill."

This was in April, 1968, right after issue number 23. It's not clear why Mel so dramatically changed his mind. In issue 21 he had announced he no longer had anything new to write, that all future words of his would be reprints. Perhaps that had something to do with it. Some say he was getting more interested in making films. Harry Bikes had a plausible, if bizarre, explanation.

"There had been a terrible incident," he recalled, scratching his belly. "This cat came up to the Hill, one of the black people involved with Avatar, named Pebbles. Pebbles was kind of a crazy guy, he considered himself to be a guru. In all likelihood he *was* a guru. And he went up and demanded to see Mel. And this guy actually got through and knocked on Mel's house, went inside and made a scene. And they had to throw him out.

"Well, Mel decided his forces had failed him, they hadn't maintained security. So as punishment he set them to work building this wall around his house. He ordered them to stop the paper and build this fucking wall!"

Sure enough, issue 24 appeared without the outer news section at all. It was simply a tabloid produced on the Hill that included practically no writing, some pictures of Mel's forces building the wall, and 20 photographs of Alison Pepper, one of the Hill women, on an acid trip. There were no ads, and the only "news" headline was on the front page: "You know what we've been doing up here on Fort Hill? We've been building a wall around Mel's house out of heavy, heavy stone."

Meanwhile the downhill scoffers were trying to organize themselves, without much success. "Finally," said Bikes, "there was a sort of compromise editorship where I was going to be co-editor with Ed Beardsley. And Mel called us up to the Hill for a private audience—which he photographed and recorded. Mel's very big on documentation; he likes to invite people in for official visits

and record and photograph them, and study them.

"He's a master at making people uncomfortable. Like when you go into his house, you have to take your shoes off. And then he doles out little favors. Like he snaps his fingers and his women will serve you coffee or brownies. Or he'll pull out some incredible joint or get you whacked out on acid.

"See, at this time they were all going through acid therapy. He was taking them one by one in his private audience and hitting them with 1500 mikes of pure acid. And studying them—filming and recording them. And playing really weird soundtracks for them like pure noise—machine gun fire, screams. And then when they were absolutely out of their minds, he would plug them into this Lyman Family group sing—love, togetherness, you know. He was playing with these people, programming them."

On this particular night, however, Mel simply explained to Bikes and Beardsley how the Avatar was his, his spirit, how they couldn't use the Avatar logo if they were to continue publishing.

"I said I didn't care," said Bikes, "I wasn't hung up on the name. I wanted a paper. We didn't need Avatar on the front page to sell it. But that scoundrel Ed Beardsley—who was really a bouncy, beagle-like kind of buffoon—when he designed page two of the next issue, he made this mock newspaper front, see, with the American flag and a dateline." Harry picked up a copy of issue 25. "And he reversed the Avatar logo. I didn't want it there, but he kept saying, 'Well, it's on page two and it's reversed.' "

Dramatically he held the paper up to his desk lamp. "But when you held page one up to the light, there it was—the Avatar he couldn't get rid of!"

Everyone on the Hill caught the reference, said Bikes. They considered it an act of blasphemy and betrayal. It was all news, no pictures of Mel. An Avatar had been printed without the Avatar's consent, and the copies were right there in the Boston office, waiting to be distributed.

"So, in the middle of the night, around 4 AM, a flotilla of cars arrived from Fort Hill." He paused and gloated; this obviously

was his favorite part of the story. "And in a matter of an hour or so they removed the issue, 35,000 copies, save for some 500 copies which we had taken home with us when they came off the truck. They had keys to the office, and they took the whole issue away and locked it in the Fort Hill tower."

That edition never appeared in public.

"For the better part of a week there were negotiations, threats, scenes," said Harry. "Fort Hill invited us all up for a big steak dinner at Kweskin's house, and we tried to iron it all out. And in the midst, they summarily removed the 35,000 papers from the tower and sold them for $35 worth of scrap paper.

"It was at that point I realized we were dealing with very dangerous people."



THIS IS MELINDA. She was just born. She has lived for ever in one small dark room. One had to crawl through a long bat-infested tunnel to get to her. She was black and covered with things gathered from the city dump. No facilities. Now she is with us on this earth. See the beginning of light in her little eyes? See how her little hand claws out trying to grasp life? See how she leans out towards your heart. Help her. Help to Melinda means help to entire *AVATAR* family.



Thousands (or at least 50 or so) of Melindas anxiously are awaiting adoption by you or your group. Your Melinda will receive a monthly cash grant, as well as spiritual counseling, blankets, use of a bath-tub, and holy spirit. Each month you will receive a letter written in her own hand, and a photograph of her as she becomes more with it! You all will develop a warm, loving relationship. Send your contributions to AVATAR – we'll take it from there. Avatar

Meanwhile Dave Wilson was fighting on another front. "We had worked like bastards on that issue," he said. "At that point we were all enough incensed that we realized this was war." They enlisted the aid of a prominent corporate lawyer in Boston, asked him to investigate the matter on a business level.

"Lo and behold we found that Fort Hill had been sloppy; they never filed the changes in board membership of Trust Incorporated. As far as the state was concerned, it was still the original seven-man board, and I was still president. We sent out certified letters for a special board meeting. Only six people showed up, only two from Fort Hill, and we just ramrodded through a whole nice little agenda of things."

First they threatened Mel Lyman and Fort Hill with legal action if the printing equipment wasn't immediately returned. It was. Then they named Dave Wilson and Harry Bikes co-editors and laid the legal groundwork for the Boston Avatar to continue unhampered. And they forgave Ed Beardsley for his tomfoolery and let him work on the art staff.

"We were determined to keep publishing," said Harry Bikes. "We worked around the clock putting out the next issue, typing it, pasting it. We had finished the paper, all but a few details, and I went home to sleep.

"The next day I was supposed to come in at noon and pick up the flats and go to the printer. Dave met me at the door. He says, 'Sit down. You can't go in there.' I says, 'What's the matter? What's the matter?'

"It seems that in the middle of the night Beardsley had defected, by going down and ripping up all the flats and crumbling them in many little pieces and shoving them in the waste basket. He was sitting there on the steps, crying. I wanted to go over and kill the motherfucker. Beardsley was the perfect double agent for Mel; he didn't know who he was from day to day."

Dave Wilson shook his head. "That was an incident I couldn't understand for two years. Two years later I found out what made Beardsley act the way he did. Antonioni, you know, discovered

Mark Frechette, one of the Fort Hill people, for that part in *Zabriskie Point.* What I didn't know was that Ed Beardsley was also being considered for the part.

"And that night Antonioni made his decision and chose Frechette over Beardsley. Beardsley just became enraged when he got the news."

But even Ed Beardsley couldn't stop the scoffers.

"We went back inside," said Bikes, "and in about four hours dug the paper out of the trash barrel and *restored* it." He giggled with confidence. "You know, flattened it out, waxed it down, fixed it up, retyped places where it was fucked up, and so on. All the flats were torn up, it was unbelievable."

"Why didn't the Fort Hill people want it printed at this point?"

"Spite. They just didn't want it to happen. They were going to do everything they could to prevent it. But when we came out with that paper, after they destroyed the flats, we broke their back. It was not a great artistic triumph, but we did it." Harry Bikes started pounding his desk for emphasis. "We *did* it. We *did* the fucking paper. We went out on the streets and we sold it. We got money. And we did others."



They did four others. Then Dave Wilson got tired, resigned, recommended Harry Bikes for the editorship and split for the New Hampshire countryside to meditate. When he returned three weeks later, the war was over. The editorial board, its balance shifted by Wilson's resignation, had selected a different editor. Ed Beardsley.

Then Bikes quit too. "I remember Dave and I just walked outside," said Harry, "sat down on the front step, looked at each other and laughed our fucking asses off."

Back on the Hill, Mel Lyman, in control once again, was making plans. He had done all he could to reach the Boston and New York areas. As always, his vision was growing. And, miraculously, his inspiration to write had returned.

"I find that I still have many words to write and Avatar is the only way I can write them," he wrote a friend. "I'm still getting a lot of letters from people who need to read me and I can only reach out and touch them through Avatar, and only if Avatar is a *national* publication. . . . Avatar cannot be just a local publication anymore, that isn't enough for me. Somehow you have got to see that it finds its way into every little corner it belongs in. A great deal is being demanded of me now, people from all over the country are making me feel their need for more understanding and I can't turn them away. . . ."

Many changes were in that first edition of the "third cycle." Mel right off had raised the price to 50 cents (later to $1). It was renamed American Avatar and was much slicker, resembling a national glossy magazine more than anything else. Mel's pictures and writings were prominently, though tastefully, displayed throughout; on the cover was a photograph of Paula Press, a 17-year-old, dark-eyed favorite of Mel's who later left the Hill people after she became disillusioned with some of their more violent practices.

The issue's only reference to the old Avatar was in the lead editorial:

"We, the old staff of the original *Avatar*, are back once again. We are here under the name, *American Avatar.* Before *Avatar* fell into the hands of vermin we had a purpose, we are back with that purpose. Before *America* fell into the hands of vermin it had a purpose, we are back to fulfill that purpose. We are sick to our stomachs of counterfeit *Avatars* and counterfeit *Americas*, we are here to do something about them both, to *dwarf* them with a *real* standard, leadership."

The magazine lasted for four issues, each a different shape and format, published irregularly between the summers of 1968 and 1969. Now safely out of the hands of vermin, Mel was free to reveal himself more specifically. He'd come pretty close to it in answering some of the earlier Letters to Mel, for example in issue 11:

MEL, THOU ART
THE INFINITE ONE WITH
ALL-PENETRATING POTENCY
TO REVOLUTIONIZE TOTAL UNIVERSE
Rex Summit

REX, YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT
Mel

And in issue 13:

Dear Mel,

Today I went tripping. While on my wanderings, I went inside of a church in Copley Square. I was totally awed by its magnificence. I felt very insignificant as I looked up at the dome hoping, and yet afraid that I might see the face of God. I didn't see Him, instead I saw your face, the face of Mel Lyman glowing against changing patterns of color. *What gives?* Either you've got me believing your egotistical ideas or maybe you really are Him!?!?! Lovingly and obediently yours,
A very stable Hobbit

I really am Him, shouldn't be so hard for you to take, imagine how it makes ME feel. . . .

But it was in the third issue of American Avatar that he dropped the final veil. On page three, next to a picture of him floating lotus-positioned in the universe with a halo above his head, a drink in his hand and a leering, shit-eating grin on his face, Mel published the following Message to Humanity:

Hi gang, I'm back, just like the book says. By God here I am, in all my glory, I thought I'd *never* come. But I'm here now and getting ready to do the good work. Maybe some of ya think I aint Him. You'll see. I aint about to prove it for you, much too corny, I'm Him and there just aint no question *about* it. Betcha never thought it would happen like *this* did ya? Sorry to disappoint you but I've got to make the most of what's here and there sure as hell aint very much. No turnin water to wine and raisin the dead this trip, just gonna tell it like it is. You've waited a long time for this glorious moment and now that it's actually *here* I expect most of you will just brush it off and keep right on waiting, that's what those damn fool Jews did *last* time I came, in fact they're

still *doing* it. Oh well, what's a few thousand *more* years to people who've been suffering for *millions.* So while most of you turn your heads and continue sticking to your silly romantic beliefs I'll let the rest of you in on a little secret. I'm Christ, I swear to God, in *person*, and I'm about to turn this foolish world upside down. . . .

The "Christ issue," as it is fondly referred to by the community, revealed another, perhaps more important vision of Melvin's. The entire front cover was a simulated television screen, a screen of the future, on which an image of Mel Lyman, looking soulfully emaciated and holding a cigaret, would someday be broadcast. That is still the dream of Fort Hill, to "take over the world through communications," particularly television, despite several unsuccessful and sometimes brutal attempts to make it a reality.

With the last issue of American Avatar, however, the Fort Hill Community retreated from public view for nearly two years. It was time for internal growth.

"After the Avatar period we could have lost our innocence," said Hill veteran David Gude. "We had a lot of people who were living together then, and we weren't able to just sit down and make records or create as we dreamt of creating. And so that started really a whole period of people learning to live together. I mean, Melvin again was creating, but this time he was creating people."



Part III
A Visit to the Wax Museum

Our ol' Pa is so funny.
He likes candy a lot.
He is so fun to play with.
We make funny newspapers.
We are making newspapers to look at them.

We are a funny family.
We are a big funny family.
The hill is good and bad.
The hill top is very funny.
—Jackie Lyman

Shortly before the summer of 1971, disturbing reports began trickling in about the Lyman Family's attempts to infiltrate the underground media. Nearly all of them involved violence of one sort or another. After young Paul Mills wrote a relatively mild article about Mel Lyman in the April 16th issue of Fusion Magazine, a window in his car was smashed and Jim Kweskin allegedly phoned Paul's mother and posed as an old friend to find out his address. That same day Fusion editor Robert Somma was essentially kidnapped; Lyman people refused to leave his office unless he would accompany them to Fort Hill, which he did. He was unharmed.

"I will forewarn you," Somma said later, "they really don't joke around. They're as malicious and malevolent as any group I've met." He said three other writers had quit the story out of fear before Mills finally completed it.

There was the rumor that Raeanne Rubenstein, current editor of Crawdaddy, had been slapped around by Fort Hill recruit Paul Williams when she wouldn't give more space to an essay he'd written about Mel. She refused to discuss the matter on the phone, but Paul later admitted it. "It was stupid," he said, "I don't know why I did it, exactly, but I had been living with the New York community and was very impressed, you know, at the way they stand up for what they have to have."

Similar, if less harsh, accounts of intimidation were coming in from The Village Voice and The Los Angeles Free Press. And several people reported that frightening incident at KPFK, the first encounter with the Lyman Family where police had to be called. In this case too, those involved refused to talk on the phone. "It's not going to be discussed by me or any member of this staff," barked Elsa Knight Thompson, acting station manager. "I don't have to explain why. And if you don't like it, call back after the 10th of this month and talk to the new manager."

When the incident was mentioned to Jim Kweskin, he suddenly turned cold and suspicious.

"What do you know about it?" he asked.

"Just . . . rumors, really."

"Tell me about them. Tell me about the rumors."

"Well, mainly that you retaliated after one of your people, Owen deLong, was fired as program director. That's about it."

Kweskin's voice was deliberate and somewhat righteous. "What you heard is true. But it didn't happen because Owen deLong was fired. It happened because Richard Herbruck—who is a very important person in the community, the Producer, produces all sorts of things—produced a bunch of radio shows that were completely *destroyed* by the engineers at KPFK. The volume kept changing all the time; at one point the sound went off completely during one of Richard Herbruck's introductions.

"And we sent our own engineer down to help them and they locked our engineer out. We sent people down to help, and all we met was hate. And resistance. And pride. And ego. Until finally

we got so angry that we had to do something to make those people feel how angry we were. Something had to be done to make the people at KPFK *feel*, feel that something, feel as bad as we did, feel what a destructive job they were doing."

But wasn't it this sort of incident that was giving the Lyman Family the reputation of Manson's?

Kweskin dismissed the idea scornfully. "The Manson Family preached peace and love and went around killing people. We don't preach peace and love.

"And," he added, smiling, "we haven't killed anybody—yet."

I climbed the crumbling stone steps to 27 Fort Avenue, Roxbury, the front office and nerve center of Fort Hill. A square-jawed young man named Jeff and a dark-haired storybook princess named Anna answered the door hugging and giggling, took me inside to the office and immediately asked me my sign and, when I confessed ignorance, my date of birth. It was the first of perhaps 40 times I was to be asked that sort of question. Fort Hill considers astrology to be a second language, a tongue in which I was about to receive a kind of crash course.

Everything has a sign, to them, not just people but animals, plants, events, cities, countries—everything with a date or location. "Mel knew the signs of everybody in the National League," recalled a downhill scoffer. "You know, he'd say, 'Baltimore's got a great Aquarian pitcher . . . too many Capricorns in the outfield.' " Generally they use the language not so much for forecasting as Monday-morning quarterbacking. Which tends to reinforce their belief that the universe, at least Mel Lyman's universe, is "unfolding as it should."

What's particularly disturbing to a non-believer is the way, once you tell them your sign, they raise their eyebrows, chuckle affirmatively and say nothing, as if with one utterance you had lost the chance to marry their daughters.

Anna had some book open and was researching my birthdate. Finally she looked up and said brightly to the others in the room, "He's a Gemini-Sagi."

"Wow," they responded, "a Gemini-Sagi." I expected applause but the matter was immediately dropped.

There was a monster switchboard-intercom system on the main desk, and Anna hit one of the buttons. "Send Paul over," she instructed. Paul Williams would take me to the studio where the men were working, she said.

In the meantime I did a quick check of the office. They had the usual office stuff—files, supplies, mimeo and photo duplicating equipment. A stack of Avatars lay on one table, next to a copy of the ROLLING STONE issue on Charles Manson marked "office copy—please save."

As one might expect, the office was blessed from one wall by a framed photograph of Mel Lyman, as was nearly every room in all the houses. On a shelf above the intercom was a small reference library, and I started jotting down the titles: *Illustrated Yoga, Webster's Dictionary, Linda Goodman's Sun Signs, Astrology for the Millions. . . .*

"What are you writing that stuff down for?" interrupted a chubby, unpleasant-looking girl named Dvora, who had just entered. "Do you think that's where your story is? It's not." The room grew chilly.

I continued: *Information Please Almanac, I Ching—Office Copy.*

"Look, he just keeps on writing," she said to the others, then turned to me. "Can I see your notes?"

I said no and her eyes narrowed. "What's your sign?" she asked hostilely.

"Gemini-Sagi."

"Oh," she snickered.

(Later the Lyman people were good enough to do my chart and have it interpreted by one of their astrological experts, a soft-spoken woman named Adele.

("Gemini is the conscious mind and Sagittarius is the super-con-

scious mind, so that your chart is full of purpose," Adele reassured me. "And your purpose is to communicate, to communicate to the *world.* You have Uranus in the tenth house, the house of outstanding goals, and Uranus is the planet of communication—so that goes with Gemini. Every time I look at your chart I feel a writer."

("Really?" I asked. "You mean if you didn't know anything about me, you'd know I was a writer, just from my chart?"

("Yeah, everything in your chart is about communicating. And because your sun is in the house of Aquarius, it's revolutionary, which means using your abilities for the masses of people. Like being a writer for Rolling Stone."

(Needless to say, I found the explanation fascinating. And so did my twin sister, Mary, who was born 13 minutes before me and, according to Adele, has a nearly identical chart. A former nurse, Mary now lives at home in West Los Angeles with her husband, a systems analyst, and three children.)

Two other books, I later discovered, were especially important on the Hill and had been read by everyone: *The Godfather*, because, as one girl put it, "We're just like the Mafia up here." And *Instant Replay*, because Mel digs football, *really* digs it, particularly televised professional football. During the season all four communities devote their weekends to it (and now Monday nights, thanks to the ABC network), usually watching two games at once on side-by-side color TVs. It all has to do with a team of people working as one unit at the direction of one man or something.

Just then the office phone rang and Jeff, the giggling, square-jawed fellow, answered. As he listened his face turned mean and bitter, his brow lowered, his square jaw jutted forth. It was more news about that damned housing project the city wants to build next to Fort Hill. Finally he started shouting. "As far as I'm concerned they're all a bunch of racists and faggots! The only thing I'd do is . . . is *straight assassination.* I mean, how are people gonna change except through violence?"

Jeff's tirade persisted as Paul Williams appeared at the doorway,

introduced himself and escorted me from the office, up Fort Avenue Terrace, the long gravel alley on which five of the Hill's eight structures stand. It was about three in the afternoon and the men had another hour to work before lunch.

As Paul explained it, the men generally started work at nine in the morning, broke for breakfast at 11, broke again for lunch at four and finished work and cleaned up just before dinner at nine in the evening. It was a schedule Mel had worked out for maximum health, appetite control and work output. Times and amounts of coffee intake were similarly dictated.

The studio where the men were working was upstairs in the last building, an old, two-story duplex known as Five and Six. Actually they were working behind the duplex, building a new two-story addition, the top floor of which could be entered from the studio. Where there were now beams and studs there would soon be a roof and walls.

Paul introduced some of the workmen, most of them Fort Hill veterans, including David Gude and Richie Guerin, the Community's brilliant young architect who bore an unnerving resemblance to pictures I'd seen of Mel. I asked Paul why there was so much building and remodeling going on.

"I think they're getting ready to rent them or sell them," he said, "some of them, at least, and so they . . ."

"Paul," Gude cut in sharply, looking up from the board he was sizing, his thin mouth straight and grim. "Don't talk about the future."

"Right, uh . . ." Paul caught his breath. ". . . we really don't know what's going to happen."

It suddenly became apparent that Paul Williams was a recruit, a pledge—a "dummie" or "turd," as such people are referred to on the Hill. I had naively assumed that a writer with a book and some reputation would automatically start at a higher level. But no, he was at the bottom bottom, and David and Richie were—well, only one person was at the top, of course—but they certainly had more authority than Paul.

Perhaps it was this kind of humiliation that, several weeks later, became more than Paul Williams could endure.

Every room at Fort Hill has been changed by the gifted handiwork of Richie Guerin, a former architectural student who five years ago dropped out and joined the Community at the age of 19. But the studio atop Five and Six is one of his masterpieces. Remodeled with materials partly bought and partly scrounged from other old buildings, the huge room is a bouquet of blended woods and purposes. Giant outdoor shutters can in seconds change a warm living room with a spectacular view of Boston to a darkened sound stage or theater. Skylights convert to rooftop exits, and baseboards unscrew for instant electrical rewiring.

"Everything is flexible 'cause you never know what you're going to need," Richie explained. "Everything is done by necessity. Necessity always breeds a perfect balance of form and function. If you follow the Need. I mean, this place is a good example. We did just what we had to do, there were really no ideas. And out of the Need came things that were, wow, really far out."

And the Need changes all the time, doesn't it? You never know when the Big Coach may suddenly call a different play. In the short history of Fort Hill, the Need has transformed house Five and Six several times. The building has served as a movie set, a recording studio and a film vault. The basement was used for target practice when the Hill was in its armed guard period. And most recently, I was to learn, the Need changed so swiftly and ruthlessly, the Community was nearly torn apart and destroyed.

Even as Richie spoke, the first floor of Five and Six was being used to store a roomful of professional television and videotape equipment, a vestige of the days in late 1969 and early 1970 when Mel Lyman had designs on the CBS-TV Network.

The story of that Need came from Don West, now editor of Broadcasting Magazine and then assistant to CBS President Dr. Frank Stanton. On Stanton's behalf he first visited Fort Hill in

July, 1969, with plans to film the Community for an experimental documentary project.

"For me this was a completely mind-blowing experience," West remembered. "I came right out of the 34th floor of CBS, I was approaching middle age, and I just fell in love with the Hill. And, I thought, they with me.

"I guess they thought I was the route to taking over CBS; they probably found me a very pliable instrument. I suspended most of my critical judgment and just let it happen, if you know what I mean.

"When I went up there the first day I was not allowed to meet Mel Lyman. However, I did meet Mark and Daria Frechette and Jim Kweskin, George Peper, David Gude, his woman Faith, Mel's first wife Sophie and his second wife Jessie. They said they were representing Mel so he wouldn't have to sit around and answer a bunch of silly questions. And it's true, the Hill *is* Mel Lyman, it's an extension of him."

For three days West simply waited and tried to blend in with the Fort Hill life. He even pulled guard duty. Finally on the third night, about three in the morning, Mel appeared.

"When I first saw Mel Lyman he looked like he was on the verge of death. He was incredibly emaciated, he could not have weighed more than 100 pounds. I really believed he was about to die, he looked so incredibly sickly. At that time he was virtually living the life of a monk, isolating himself inside his house, producing things, films. There was a red light on the outside of his house, and when it was on, boy, you did not get in."

With Don that early morning was a friend and colleague, Stan White, now an art director in New York. Mel asked both of them to watch his films. "I thought the films were quite good, considering he had no technical background and no decent equipment. I'm not sure Stan White would agree, but they really affected me. There was one where Mel got up one morning before the children and did a film of the children waking up. And it was very moving."

That was the film, edited in his camera, for which Mel later

recorded a harmonica soundtrack using only the memory of the film as his guide. The two creations matched perfectly—a miracle often retold by the Lyman family.

Mel also showed them his movie of Jim Kweskin on acid. "I don't understand drugs very much, particularly LSD," said West, "but Kweskin completely changed his personality. In fact, he changed his signs on that trip. I don't know if it was on the cusp or what, but I remember Kweskin gave up one life and took on another. It was a very long trip."

A little too long, perhaps, for Stan White, who apparently wasn't as impressed with the films as West. "In discussing the films afterwards," said Don, "Stan asked Mel a question, a simple, logical question, something like, 'Do you think you could follow a script?'

"Mel said no, absolutely not, and then he flew into a rage. He turned to Stan and shouted, 'When did you die? When did you die inside? You double Cancer you!'

"I couldn't understand what got into him. Apparently Mel did have some very personal problems. I just stood there, I didn't know what to do. And all the other people in the room, all the Fort Hill people, had gone into this almost catatonic thing, you know? Like they were . . . like they were *molded out of wax*."

The two left the Hill immediately. White never returned, but West appeared again in October, this time with videotape equipment and a camera crew from Boston's WGBH.

"The working title for the project was *The Real World,*" said Don, "and I had the idea of contrasting two communes—this young people's commune in Boston and an old people's retirement commune in Seal Beach, California. I had hired the Video Freex of New York to film the old people's commune."

After shooting Fort Hill all day, the WGBH crew left and Don West and the Lyman Family sat down to view the tapes.

"Suddenly they confronted me—there were about 30 of them—they said that what we'd shot was bullshit, it was superficial. David Gude said something like, 'You talk about the Real World—this is the real world,' and he pulled out a German Luger and shoved

it in my face. 'This is *our* real world!'

"God, he sure made his point with *me.* That was the first time I saw a gun on the Hill." Later West discovered that the Fort Hill guard was completely armed.

"They wanted to make every situation a confrontation. As an independent observer I'd have to say their techniques are very severe. If a guy makes a mistake they really give it to him. I remember one guy had said something wrong over the radio . . ."

"The radio?"

"Yeah, they had this walkie-talkie-type radio system in all the houses to alert everyone if there was trouble. And this guy had said something dumb or obscene over it. And they put him through the damnedest grueling I'd ever seen, just kept firing questions at this poor guy for 10 or 15 minutes until he finally broke."



Harry Bikes recalled a similar confrontation at the height of the Hill-scoffer war of April, 1968: "About this time there was an incident at the Club 47. It was their last night, the club was closing, and the Lyman Family was supposed to perform. Their act had really changed, it was like a church meeting. Kweskin would get up there and lecture, and the audience would yell 'fuck you,' that sort of thing.

"Anyway, that night Eben Given and Brian Keating got in a wild fist fight over something or other, and the whole family went berserk, right on stage. Then everybody went up to the Hill where they were having an enormous reception for Mel. It was his birthday and the ladies had made an incredible cake.

"But after a couple of minutes, the whole thing turned into a kangaroo indictment of Brian Keating. They busted him of every last vestige of self respect; he was just *destroyed* in front of our very eyes. He was saying, 'I have no answers. I have nothing to say.' And then he just collapsed on the floor. I have never seen a man cry like that.

"Eventually they busted Eben and threw him off the Hill. He

was reduced to a spineless fool. The guys were coming out every morning and nailing his door shut. And he'd just go out the window and never say anything about it.

"The whole thing is about spinelessness."

Bikes had a secret. "You know what they call Jim Kweskin on the Hill?" he asked, gloating. "They call him Squishy."



"Anyway," continued Don West, "after David and the others confronted me, I told them, 'All right, I'll do my own taping.' And I handed a camera to George Peper.

"George is the scion of a wealthy Connecticut family who lived under really pampered conditions. He was a New England tennis champion and everything. But when Mel found him he was at the bottom of the barrel, he was into a lot of drugs, you know? But George, who had never handled a camera in his life, really did a beautiful job."

So beautiful that Don invited George to accompany him around the country and help shoot other segments of *The Real World*, including a mental institution in Delaware. "It was a heavy decision for him," said Don. "He had been on the Hill for four years and he didn't want to go. He was actually afraid of the outside world. But he did a fantastic job."

George traveled with Don West until mid-January, 1970. During that time the news broke across the country that Charles Manson had been arrested for the murder of Sharon Tate.

"George became tremendously excited when the news came out," remembered West. "At his insistence, we stopped at a roadside phone booth and he called Mel. I never found out the substance of that conversation, except something to the effect that they considered Manson to be the anti-Christ, representing evil, and Mel to be Christ, representing good.

"I remember George was terribly anxious to get into the Manson trial; he kept asking CBS if we could get him a press pass so he could get in. I'm quite sure if you got Mel Lyman and Charles

Manson debating in front of a camera, the film that came out of that camera would be something else."

A few weeks later the short, grand partnership of West and Peper ended abruptly—after CBS looked at the tapes they'd shot. "The upshot of the show was they found it far too radical," said Don. "I think they felt I should leave CBS, and I did leave.

"But to my dismay, the Hill and I also split. What happened was, I had given them a complete television system to use, a half-inch system with a camera, plus an Angienux lens and a Sonheisen microphone—about $1800 worth of equipment. The Hill had borrowed that equipment from me, but when I went to retrieve it, they refused to give it up."

West sounded apologetic. "I guess I still am in a hangup about the rights to property. On my last visit to the Hill, to get the equipment, they told me, 'You're not the same guy who came up here before.' And that was true in a sense. I'd been burned a lot. The Video Freex refused to shoot the old people's commune. I had tried to effect a change in the CBS system; had I been successful, it would have been a different network. I jeopardized my career and my family. I put every dime I had into that farce. And now the Hill was keeping my equipment and having nothing to do with me.

"When I say we split, I mean I've never seen them again."

"Do you think they were friendly only when you were useful to them?"

"It would be hard for me to resist that conclusion," West admitted sadly. "The fact is, they still call me now and then when they need something. In March of this year George Peper called me from New York City, said he was looking for a publisher for Mel's new book.

"After I hung up I thought to myself, 'God, they never stop. They never stop asking for things.' "



"Pass the butter?" asked Richie, tearing apart a slice of white bread and nodding thanks. It was just after 4 PM and the dozen studio workers were seated at a round table just off the main dining area of the Fort Hill mess hall. Two plain-faced women had just cooked and served up a starchy meal of macaroni and cheese, bread and punch, and now they sat on stools a few feet away, giggling to each other. Apparently they had already eaten.

Hungry and good-spirited, the men gossiped behind the backs of absent girls and novitiate "turds."

"How's David Plaine doin'?" asked David Gude of square-jawed Jeff.

"Aw, he just needs a friend," said Jeff.

"He doesn't need a friend, he needs a trainer," sneered Kurt Frank as the others laughed.

"Today he said to me—" and here Jeff's voice took on a stupored, dumb-beast quality—" '*Think I'm gonna leave the Hill.*' "

Richie's mouth dropped open. "You must be kiddin'," he said.

"So this morning he didn't show up for work," said Jeff. "He was supposed to paint. And I went to his room, and he had his bags packed."

"You must be *kiddin'*!" laughed Richie, a bite of bread dropping on his lap.

"I said, 'What do you think you're doing?' He says, '*Think I'm gonna leave the Hill.*' I said, 'Well, David, what's it gonna be? You wanna go painting or you wanna go to the vault?' "

David Gude listened and smiled, revealing a huge black gap in his front teeth, as Jeff continued in a stupored voice.

" '*Well, I sure don't wanna go to the vault.*' I said, 'So what are you going to do?' He thinks real hard for a minute and says, '*Think I'll run away.*' "

Everyone had stopped eating now, shifted, and focused his attention on the smiling jaw.

"So Bruce Virgo and Bruce Scorpio grabbed him by the shoulder, lifted him up and said, 'All right, let's go to the vault.' And he just *exploded*, started screaming and waving his arms and legs.

He'd been asleep before, you know? But now he was suddenly *real.*

"They took him outside and threw him to the ground. I was so mad I jumped on his chest, and I was just about to smash him in the face, you know?" Jeff clenched his fist and drew it back over his shoulder.

"Yeah? Yeah?" said Richie.

Jeff dropped his arm. "And then I thought about that thing David Gude said about Primitive Love, you know? And I just got up and said to him, 'You decide.' "

Gude seemed disappointed. "That don't matter," he protested, "you could've hit him in the face anyway. *That's* Primitive Love. You know, *pow*!" and he thrust out his own clenched fist, stopping an inch from Jeff's bull's-eye jaw.

"That's right, *pow*!" shouted Kurt, laughing, almost smashing Gude from across the table.

"Shit yeah, *pow*!" laughed Richie, nearly decking Kurt.

"Pow!" said Jeff.

"Pow!" said Kurt.

"Pow!" said Richie.

"Pow!" said David.

"Pow! Pow!" They were all up out of their seats now, leaning across the table, laughing wildly, filling the air with fists and bobbing faces. Their good humor had a simple, campfire quality to it, the inbred wit of real family closeness. One could forget momentarily that it was inspired by actual violence . . . and something about a vault?

After a few seconds the men settled down, however, leaving Jeff to finish his story.

"So David Plaine went back to his room. And a few minutes later he came out and said he wanted to go painting."

There was even a moral. "He was just waiting," explained Jeff, "for someone to talk him out of it."

Kurt looked up from his lunch and nodded. "Yep, he just needed a friend."



The wise man builds his house upon a rock
The wise man builds his house upon a rock
The wise man builds his house upon a rock
And the rains come tumb-bel-ling down.

And the hands of three tiny Lyman children, two boys and a girl, came tumbling down upon the third floor of 27 Fort Avenue, where, for my benefit, an impromptu concert of sweet angel voices was in progress. And the hands came up when the floods came up.

The rains came down and the floods came up
The rains came down and the floods came up
The rains came down and the floods came up
But the house on the rock stayed firm.

The foolish man builds his house upon the sand
The foolish man builds his house upon the sand
The foolish man builds his house upon the sand
And the rains came tumb-bel-ling down.

The rains came down and the floods came up
The rains came down and the floods came up
The rains came down and the floods came up
And the house on the sand went—whoosh!

And the *whoosh* lifted the children into the air, their hands shooting away from their tiny protruding bellies, their angel melody dissolved by the flood of shrieks and shrill giggles. Anna, the long-gowned storybook princess, had led them in the song while giving me a tour of the Fort Hill Community.

Like 29 and 31 Fort Avenue next door, 27 Fort Avenue is an aging, three-story apartment building used mainly as a dormitory by the Community. The three buildings are around the corner from Fort Avenue Terrace and generally are in worse repair than the homes on that block. In fact 29 was nearly in a skeletal condition, all pipes and wires—another remodeling project of Richie's.

"The men do all the work themselves," said Anna as we walked outside. "Rather than just paint things over, they scrape down to bare wood and start at the bottom—like life, you know?"

We cut across the weedy little park that skirts the base of the Fort Hill tower, as Anna, her gown blowing in the late afternoon breeze, told me everything she knew about the historic structure: that it was the highest point in Boston, maybe, and was full of pigeon shit.

From the park we could easily see all the Community houses, Anna pointing them out. Next to Five and Six was Four-and-a-Half, which belonged to Mel when he still lived on the Hill. You can tell by the eight-foot-high stone wall that surrounds the entire front yard.

"Like, there's an awful lot of history in that wall," said Anna. "Like Mel had a dream, and afterwards he told Richie, he said, 'Now Richie, like, I want you to build a wall.'

"If you look closely, you can see how the stones on the bottom are rough and uneven but the stones on top, after the men got *into* it, are smooth and even—like life, you know?"

Next to Four-and-a-Half is a vacant lot . . . in which a story is buried somewhere. Anna said she didn't know the story, but earlier photographs of Fort Hill show a large, dark home similar to the others standing on that spot. Actually I heard several stories but for a long time could confirm none of them.

One story was that the home, known as Four, was uninhabitable and had to be torn down. That was the one told most by people on the Hill. Another, told by a few Hill people, was that the home was uninhabitable but was completely repaired by Richie & Associates. When they tried to buy it from the owner, however, she asked an outrageously high price, so they made it uninhabitable again, removed all the plumbing and wiring and everything, and bought it for a lower price.

Months later I heard a more complete account from a long-time Hill resident who had recently defected. According to him, all three stories include elements of the truth, particularly the last.

"The house incident climaxed a series of smaller incidents between the Hill and the neighborhood that came to a head in the summer of 1969," he recalled. "What happened was, all the neighborhood kids liked to ride their bikes on the hill. All the Hill kids did too, for that matter, *all* the kids, white and black.

"But that summer one of the neighborhood kids apparently knocked over one of the Lyman kids with his bike—I'm not sure of the specifics—and Mel immediately ordered the guards not to allow any more bike riding on the hill."

Lyman had no right to enforce such an order, of course; the hill area itself is a public park. And the neighborhood parents, infuriated, marched en masse to the Community for an angry Sunday afternoon confrontation. Somehow the meeting ended peacefully, but feelings were tense and bitter, and soon the guards started carrying guns.

About the same time, said the defector, relations also broke down between the Community and the owner of House Four, an eccentric old landlady named Lena. For various reasons, including nonpayment of rent, she wanted the Lyman people out; and when they balked, she decided to sell the place for $3000. She even found a buyer, a group of local black musicians called Black Music Inc.

Well, the Fort Hill Community freaked. "It wasn't the *black thing* necessarily," claimed the defector, "although Richie was on *his* trip and everything; it was just the reality of a group of strange people moving right into the middle of our Community—the *foreignness* of it all." A foreignness similar, no doubt, to a group of white hippies moving into a black ghetto.

"Finally it was decided by us that they simply could not live there. Of course, we had no legal way to stop them, so we literally made the house condemnable—by destroying it."

The Hill people rationalized that since Four was condemnable when they moved into it in 1966, they had a perfect right to leave it that way when they moved out. To avoid detection, they decided to work at night and wreck the inside of the house only. Extra guards were posted to keep the area free of inquisitive intruders,

particularly Lena the landlady.

"I remember the first night very well," the defector said. "It was a windy, rainy October night; I was posting guard. They started on the roof, dismantling the chimney. Then they cut through some rafters below.

"Suddenly I looked up and saw the silhouette of her coming across the hill—Lena—this muttering old hag with a stick in her hand."

An alert was sounded and the Fort Hill wreckers immediately fell silent, pulled the plugs on their power tools and shut off the lights. David Gude rushed up to Lena and started berating her furiously, even pushing her about, until she reluctantly turned and trudged off to her home a few blocks away. The wreckers continued.

"Finally the whole first floor caved in," recalled the defector. "It was no longer safe; they had sabotaged the main beams. Within a couple of nights the structure was fairly fucked.

"Naturally the neighborhood became enraged. There was a meeting between Black Music Inc. and Fort Hill, sort of as a prevention of war. A bunch of our guys went down there, and I remember at one point we said, 'OK, if you want a war, we'll give it to you!' And as I say, we were ready, we had guns and everything."

Apparently the meeting worked. There was no war, not even any legal action. Eventually Fort Hill bought the gutted house and razed it completely the following spring, starting on Easter Sunday.

Wouldn't it have been more profitable, I asked the defector, had Fort Hill bought the house before it was gutted?

"I know," he said, "but the point is, you see, we live for the moment."

Anna pointed out the rest of the houses. Next to the vacant lot is the children's house, actually two houses, Two and Three, connected by a wood-paneled hallway Richie built. And finally there's One, the mess Hall. The children's house, said Anna, serves as both nursery and school. With minimal supervision, the children

live by themselves, after being taken from their mothers about the age of two.

"It's not as bad as it might sound," she explained. "I mean, we're all one big family here, the Lyman Family, you know? And like, the father is Melvin."

Anna offered to take me over to the children's house and introduce me to Lou, the kids' new teacher. On our way I asked her about the vault.

Her delicate face suddenly hardened; she appeared frightened and began stammering. "The vault? . . . what? . . . I mean, where did you? . . . who mentioned the vault?"

"Some of the men were talking about David Plaine at lunch, and they mentioned the vault."

She shook her head. "I don't really know . . . it's this room with brick walls all around and no windows and a door you can lock, you know? And sometimes people who are, you know, having *problems*. . . .

"But we hardly ever use it. You have to be very careful how you use it. But there's no light inside, you know? And you can really learn about yourself."

Anna hurried up the front steps and into the children's house. It was after five and the sun was lowering behind the Fort Hill Tower, causing the shadow of the thick, weathered erection to extend and penetrate the dark shrubbery behind the homes.



"We believe that woman serves God through man," said Lou, an attractive former nun now in her first stage of pregnancy. "I was sort of into women's lib before I came up here, you know, 'cause so many men are such piss-ants, such faggots. But when I came up here and started serving them breakfast, I really began looking up to them."

She shoved a spoonful of strained vegetables into the squirming infant on her lap.

"The men here on the Hill are real men; the men out there are faggots, with their long hair and everything. If they weren't, they wouldn't let their women get away with the things they do."

Lou learned about the true role of women from something Mel wrote in the Avatar. "If a woman is really a woman, and not just an old girl," wrote Mel, "then everything she does is for her man and her only satisfaction is in making her man a greater man. She is his quiet conscience, she is his home, she is his inspiration and she is his living proof that his life, his labors, are worthwhile.

"A woman who seeks to satisfy herself is the loneliest being in God's creation. A woman who seeks to surpass her man is only leaving herself behind. A man can only look ahead, he must have somewhere to *look* from. A woman can only look at her man . . . I have stated the Law purely and simply. *Don't break it.*"

Not that anyone does. Most of the Hill women, if they're not holding down outside "female" jobs as waitresses or secretaries, spend their time cooking, sewing, cleaning house, tending the children and serving the men. They seem to do so with great relish, developing an almost worshipful attitude toward the men.

"I mean, couldn't you feel it in those men at lunch?" asked Lou, "how strong they were? How simple? Life here is so simple. Of course, the more simple life is, the harder it is. Let me tell you, there's a lot of hate and frustration up here. And pain.

"When I first came up here I was a bitch." Lou sneered at herself. "A bitch, hah, that's putting it mildly. I was a viper. I hated Mel Lyman, I hated everyone here. I resisted like hell. And the thing that shocked me was how much they still cared about me. I mean, with me my hatred was personal, 'cause I hated on such a low level. But they taught me how to hate on a *higher* level."

Why did she first hate Mel? I asked.

"Because he was stronger than me. I guess I wanted to be God too. But finally I had to break down; he was so much stronger than me, I finally had to accept it."

"Do you believe he's God?"

"Yeah, in the sense that Jesus Christ came down on earth. But

he's dead, so Mel's the son of God now." As she said these last words, Lou raised her eyes in adoration toward a photograph of Mel on the opposite wall, the one on the cover of the Christ issue.

"When I first met Mel," she continued, "it was really weird, 'cause he was the most down-to-earth, easygoing guy I'd ever met. Until he looked at you, and then, oh God, his force just filled the room.

"Now I love him intensely, I'm his forever. I want to conquer the world for Mel. I get so mad at that world out there I want to kill, I want to shove Mel in their hearts. He's the only one who knows how to deal with *feeling*, the feelings you have at the time, whether they're love, or hate, or fear."

She said Mel was a great leader, like Abraham Lincoln. "We believe very much in Abraham Lincoln and other great leaders of the past—even Hitler. Anyone who causes change in society is an agent of God."

I asked Lou how she thought Hitler had changed society. She looked puzzled, finally exasperated. "I don't know. I don't know," she said, a bit irritated. "My problem was I thought too much. I betrayed my heart. That's what you are, you know, when you think instead of feel—a traitor."

By this time Lou had finished feeding the baby that was on her lap. She wiped its mouth, kissed it, then turned to me and said sweetly, "That's all Mel wants, you know. He just wants to put a great big heart in that world out there, and get us away from the mind."

Lou is the woman hired a year ago to teach all the Fort Hill children.

It was time, I figured, to go see about my sleeping accommodations for the night. Jim Kweskin had suggested I stay at Fort Hill for several days if I ever wanted to get the "real story," and, he hinted, if I ever wanted to see the real Mel.

I told Lou I'd see her later, that I had much to learn, and she leaned forward and confided cheerfully, "I'll warn you. They're not gonna leave you untouched."



Indoors, in every Lyman home in every Lyman community, the Family moves on stocking feet, first depositing its shoes in an entrance hall, or in the case of the Fort Hill mess hall, an enclosed front porch. Keeps things cleaner, was the only reason I was ever given.

It was just after nine and the mess hall porch had been filling up steadily with boots, shoes, slippers and sandals, male and female, until there were maybe 40 or 50 pairs, nearly covering it wall to wall. Some of them had been worn in work around the Hill that day, but most had been worn on private jobs throughout the city.

The banquet table—three regulation-sized ping pong tables covered with white linen—was almost surrounded by cordial, chattering young people, their plates steaming with some kind of casserole and vegetables served buffet style. I took a modest portion, partly because again it looked quite starchy and partly because Harry Bikes had told me of a dinner he'd attended where a Lyman veteran approached him menacingly and said, "You took two pieces of chicken!"

Apparently one could sit anywhere, and I chose a spot next to Kurt Franck and across from Richie Guerin. On the wall behind Richie hung another photo of Melvin, and it was amazing how much Richie looked like his master. Many of the young men resemble Mel's picture but not as much as Richie, who could easily double for him if he were maybe eight or ten years older.

Most of the men and women at Fort Hill are in their 20s and extremely handsome, their faces fresh and glowing, their eyes—well, they're not weird or anything, it's just that you always notice their eyes. Maybe because they always notice you.

The men wear their hair shorter than many of their contemporaries, not cop short, but about the length of maybe a Hollywood bank teller's. Most of their ears are visible. The women nearly always wear dresses; I can't recall any exceptions.

Anna, one of the Hill's prettiest, sat down next to a bashful, red-haired fellow named Paul, and they immediately became the butt of the evening's joke. Jeff started it. "What's goin' on down there?" he inquired in a teasing, Protestant Bible-school manner. "You guys having a little *personal relationship*?"

The two giggled and blushed. Everyone joined in, laughing, the men fabricating implications in their ripest falsettos. It was a joke. Get it? Because Paul and Anna couldn't possibly be having a personal relationship; if they were, the matter would have been treated much differently. Such couplings are harshly discouraged on the Hill.

"Every once in a while, you know, you can tell when somebody's got a little trip going," Richie said later, "and two people go off and have their little room somewhere. And they eat alone and try to pull one of those *separatist* kind of numbers, and have this little family scene away from the Family. It's like ridiculous. And sometimes that has to be dealt with.

"There's no secrets here, absolutely not. Everybody knows everybody clean through—*clean through.* I mean like, nobody can get away with *anything*, you know, and that's what makes it so *real.*"

In the meantime a few last Fort Hill diners had straggled in and somehow found a place at the table. Richie surveyed the room, then asked, "Where's David Plaine?"

There was silence. "Maybe he knows turds aren't welcome here," someone said contemptuously, and the conversation resumed. Kurt, a former math whiz at M.I.T., asked me what my sign was and I asked him why astrology was so important on the Hill. He shrugged and said, "It's just a real quick way to talk about people."

With nearly 50 people participating in the banquet, scraping their plates, chewing, chatting with those next to them, the din was considerable, yet cheerful and certainly not unusual or unpleasant. But suddenly Dvora, the unpleasant looking girl I'd met earlier in the front office, threw down her fork and shouted, "What is this, a cocktail party?"

As if they had been rehearsed, the entire group of people shut

up at once. You could still hear the scraping and chewing, but nobody said a word, or even managed a sheepish grin. After a few minutes I asked Kurt why no one was talking.

"Last night the trivia got pretty heavy," he whispered, "so we decided not to talk at dinner unless there was something important to say." I wondered what he meant by heavy trivia.

More minutes passed, and finally the scraping and chewing stopped too, leaving an occasional chair squeak as people shifted into good staring positions. Then there was a new sound. Not everyone caught it at first—footsteps approaching from outside, boots trudging up the front steps, the front door opening and closing, bootsteps changing into sock steps, slowly stalking down the rug-covered hallway floor toward the dining room.

It was David Plaine. Someone started singing and the others followed: "For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow. . . ."

A sensitive-looking young man with glasses and a painful face, David Plaine meekly stood at the dining room entrance and took his medicine. He was crying.

". . . which nobody can deny." Richie made a loud fart noise with his mouth, and the crowd broke up laughing and jeering. Lou jammed a kitchen towel in David's face and said, mocking him, "Here, dry your tears, baby." Angrily he snapped his head back, which produced a chorus of boos.

When no one asked him to sit down at the table, he walked out to the kitchen where Lou began lecturing him in whispers. She must have hit a nerve because a short while later he turned around, ran down the hall and out the door, Lou calling after him, "Go ahead, that's right! Leave! Run away!"

At the table, Richie motioned to two of the larger men, and the three immediately bolted up and ran after him.



"They hate to see people leave the Hill, 'cause in a way they're very parasitic," said Norman Truss, a former member of the Lyman

Family who split from the Hill two years ago upon the recommendation of his psychiatrist. "You know, if you watch children, how they have to have all their things organized and in little piles? That's the way the Hill is; they want you on their pile.

"Did you meet Kurt? Kurt Franck? He's such a smart person, really a nice guy. He tried to leave one night and they ripped the wires out of his car."

Then there's the one about Marlena, said Truss, the girl who finally had to buy her way off the Hill.

"She was Richie's girl. God, Richie—he's really sick. He's sort of the head of their Gestapo. He's got a Luger and he used to teach target practice in the basement of the studio. They've all got guns up there—to protect them from what they call the 'nigs.'

"Anyway, Marlena lived on the Hill with Richie for a year and a half—until she had this sort of nervous breakdown. At that point her relations with the Hill were really falling apart.

"Now, I told you those people were parasites, and one of the best ways to get in their good graces is to give them money. So she offered Richie $1000 that she'd been secretly saving in a bank account."

Despite the offer, said Norman, Marlena's relations continued to deteriorate, and somehow shortly after that—Norman doesn't have those details—she was able to sneak off the Hill without anyone stopping her.

"However, a few days later, Kweskin calls her on the phone and says, 'What about the money?' And she says, 'Look, there's no written note, and since when does the Hill start keeping *its* promises?' Man, ten minutes later, Richie's on the phone: 'Marlena, you promised Melvin that money. And if you don't pay it, you'll be sorry.'

"Finally they settled on $700, and she sent him a check immediately, she was so scared. And they left her alone. Later she found out why Richie was so desperate—he'd already purchased a color TV for Melvin, that motherfucker.

"See, most of them on the Hill, they're just using Mel to get

off on. They *say* Mel is God, but I don't think they really *feel* it." Truss admitted his bias. "I mean, how could you think he was God? Not until I saw him walk across water would I believe that."

The wealthy son of a Boston underwear wholesaler, Norman is a slightly bloated fellow who spends much of his time collecting rare species for a terrarium that now nearly fills one of his family's four garages.

"A shrink would have a field day with 90 percent of the people on that hill," he continued. "When I lived there they had the upper echelon people and then the people they called the dummies. And the game they played was called 'do as I say, not as I do.' I mean, you couldn't win. The only rules were the ones Mel made up as he went along, and he changed them from day to day. And if you argued, 'But yesterday you said this,' they'd come back with some shit like, 'As long as it flows, man.' "

According to Truss, the Hill's only consistent rule is: Thou Shalt Not Think for Thyself.

"One time Melvin had an operation on his ass. I don't know what the problem was, exactly, but they were all sittin' around talking about it. And some kid says, 'Oh, you mean Melvin has an asshole like everyone else?' And he was ostracized for a week; he was almost beaten up right on the spot."

Norman walked by a recent addition to his terrarium and offered it a piece of lettuce, which it devoured savagely.

"I'll tell you something about Mel Lyman. The things he says are true because he's read a lot, but he's never had an original thought in his life. He's read a little Emerson, a little Alan Watts—besides being totally mad, he's very shrewd. He's a perfect con artist.

"Have you seen his films? His films are *deplorable*—terrible, amateurish. He's not a creative person. If he were, he wouldn't need 30 people around him kissing his ass all the time."

Norman's voice was getting more agitated, and there was a slight wheeze to it.

"Like Jim Kweskin. Jim Kweskin had the nerve to call me up a while back and ask for money. You know how he speaks in this real sing-song, childish type voice? He said, 'Melvin's found this *wonderful* house in L.A., and we were *wondering* if you'd like to *donate* some *money* so we could go and buy it for him.'

"I felt like saying to him, 'Tell Melvin to shove his house up his hemorrhoidal ass.' "



Although she was one of the youngest members of the Hill, and certainly one of the youngest to win Mel's special attention, Paula Press was in many ways typical of the women who joined the Lyman Family—particularly because of her background and her immediate circumstances. She may be more eloquent and beautiful than most of the others, but her reasons for joining, and finally leaving, the Community are representative and say much about Fort Hill.

Today she lives in a modest downstairs apartment in downtown Boston from which she keeps closely in touch with a number of women who have left the Hill.

"All my life I'd been just sort of not able to make friends, always wanting to be popular but never knowing what to do or what to say," she said in a fragile yet controlled voice. "I went to a private girls' school in Cambridge, and my father worked for M.I.T. And then I started reading Avatar, and I went down and started working in the office. This was in '68, and I was 17.

"And that's when I got to know the people. I got pregnant, and I guess that started it. It just heightened my need to be accepted by a group, you know? And eventually I moved up there on the Hill."

Paula remembers vividly her first encounter with Melvin.

"I was walking by the Hill—it was a grey day, very eerie—and Mel was there, standing next to the tower. I just kept walking; I didn't say a word to him, but I knew who it was. And shortly after that I got a message from George Peper that Mel wanted to see me.

"So then it blossomed, and I was accepted immediately. I was his material. He saw something in me, sad eyes or something, which *then* I believed—I believed it so I sort of made it. I'd walk around with sad eyes, half tearful eyes."

She laughed at herself, but even so, her eyes did seem a bit sad, pure brown circles set deeply in a face fair and model-perfect.

"And suddenly, it was such a snow-balling thing, being accepted for the first time in my life. Not only being accepted but being *revered*, you know? If you're in with Mel, regardless of what kind of shmuck you are, the rest of the Hill admires you, worships you. Which is more than I ever wanted."

"What was it like, the first time you went to see him?"

"Well, did you see his living room in Jessie's house—Four-and-a-Half? It's very curtained and very dark and velvety. The whole environment enhances his aura. You know, it's like *The Wizard of Oz*, in the movie, where he comes out—this big head in a ball of fire.

"Mel is really effeminate-looking, thin and misty like a drawing. He's like a bird or a cat, and he always crouches like this." Here Paula jumped up and perched on the edge of her apartment couch, her slim arms dangling around her knees.

"He'd crouch anywhere, on a chair, on my stereo. It was really eerie—his cackling, his singing. He doesn't sing, actually, he moans and he calls it singing. He moans to a guitar or something—oooooooh, you know? Did you see *2001*? The monolith scene where they go ooooooooh—he sings sort of like that. Did he play some of his music for you?"

I said I hadn't met him.

"Oh, well it's . . ." Something was bothering Paula. She let out a short, puzzled laugh, frowned and shook her head. "That's funny, that little thing, you know?"

"What?"

"I didn't think it, but you said you never met him, and there was a little thing, a vestige I guess. I got this Hill feeling, like, 'Oh, you never met him, then you're a little bit . . . *inferior.*' "

She laughed again. "I don't feel that way, but it's a vestige, like a tailbone."

After she met Mel, said Paula, she asked him to guide her on an acid trip, since he was considered an expert in that sort of thing.

"I wanted to take it because I felt so unhappy and bottled up, and I thought, wow, he'd be there so I could really cry and scream and freak out, and afterwards I'd feel better.

"But he gives really strong doses, and I hallucinated and everything. He was growing horns, they were growing all over the room, and he was changing from various kinds of animals. He was watching TV, and when he turned it off—now in retrospect it seems so stupid—he turned it off, and that light that keeps shining on the TV, that little teeny thing? That became like a beacon to me; that was my goal.

"And the combination of the music and his singing and his talking and his telling me that I was the superstar of the Hill, that I had the potential of changing the world, that he could change the world through me . . . the combination of that and the TV light made him seem like—I hate to say God—just an incredibly wise person."



Kay Boyle recalled a similar manifestation of Mel's power from the time she was living with her daughter Faith on Fort Hill.

"One night when I was there, my daughter was cooking supper, and I was sitting having a Dubonnet in the sitting room.

"And she said, 'I'll play you something, a tape.'

"And she played me something—a girl having an LSD trip, with David and Mel who were guiding her, whatever it's called.

"It was so shocking, it was so ghastly, it was so awful.

"She was screaming, 'I love you, I love you, this is so marvelous. Oh Mel, you are the most beautiful man.'

"And he was chortling like a—really like a devil.

"And she said, 'Oh, don't go! Don't ever leave me. Oh no!' "

Kay Boyle sighed and clasped her thin hands tightly in her lap.

"And afterwards Faith came out and said, 'How did you like it?'

"And I said I thought it was dreadful, and she said, 'Mama, that was me.'

"I hadn't recognized my own child's voice."



Swooping from her perch, Paula Press reassembled herself on the living room couch.

"I consider everybody from the Hill sick, sort of," she said. "They're people who cannot function in the world, for one reason or another. I couldn't when I went up there. They've always felt inferior, so they get together and they form their own little world. And they're really out of it, out of *life*, they're so out of touch with reality, you know?

"I mean, even now, when I reread Mel's writing, there's a kernel that I still believe in. Not what he feels about 'niggers,' as he says, or 'kikes,' but some of the other stuff. It's just the way it's practiced that's so warped.

"They talk about love and they live in such hate. They preach hate. You must have gotten a lot of HP."

"HP?"

"Hill Philosophy. 'You only grow through pain'—that's an HP. 'Misery is the greatest source of knowledge.' 'Loneliness is the only thing that unites the world'—which is sort of true if you think about it. But it's not the only thing, it's just one of many.

"They say that falling in love is the flash, it never lasts. You may grow together, but eventually you'll still be two lonely people, so you take someone else. And that's what the idea for a commune was—a whole group of people united in their loneliness and working for something constructive."

Is there much personal love on the Hill? I asked Paula.

"I think there is, but if it's felt for any amount of time, it gets so suspected and everybody gets so jealous, that it's destroyed. I saw that happen all the time. People beaten up verbally. It was

like a play almost—the same words with different actors.

"Many people would gang up on one person, and they'd make you feel like a worm. *I* even got really nasty when I was there, I never thought I had it in me. These poor shmucks were wandering around like flies in a spider's nest—such innocuous people. And I would get my cheap thrills by making them feel low. I suddenly realized I had this power, and I got out of control with it."

When I asked Paula about the vault, she became very excited, almost exhilarated. "The vault?" she said. "What's the vault? It must be something new! Tell me about it."

"Apparently it's some kind of room with no windows where they lock you up if you've been bad."

She seemed dismayed, twisting her head back and forth, trying to shake out the idea.

"This is beyond anything I've ever heard. I can imagine them killing. They would kill with their hands if they had to. They don't need a gun.

"They get more like the SS every day. I wonder if Mel's patterning himself after that?"

With this thought, Paula began to sort of laugh and jabber at the same time, almost hysterical.

"I'm waiting for the ovens.

"They'll turn the tower into a giant oven.

"Smoke will be steaming out.

"I'm sure they'll do something completely efficient like lampshades also."



. . . back here with Norman Tuss in front of his giant garage terrarium. Norm, speaking of garages, could you tell the folks about Mel's Volkswagen bus?

"Well, Melvin had this Volkswagen bus that became like a second penis to him. And one day, after it had broken down or something, he sent it to Howard Kilby, this mechanic who had lived on the Hill but at the time was living off the Hill. And when

Mel got it back, it still wouldn't start. Howard thought he had fixed it, you know, but anybody can make a mistake, right?

"Now a *sane* person would call up and say, 'Hey Howard, what's wrong with the bus? Ya didn't fix it.' Something like that. But not right away call up, like Richie did, and say—'We're gonna kill you.'

"They sent people down to Howard's place in Brookline and started to harass him. And finally Richie went down there and he beat Howard up. He broke open a window of Howard's house—this is while Howard was asleep at night—and like an animal, crawled in, leaped on his bed and started pistol whipping him. He was yelling, 'I'm gonna kill you, you son of a bitch!'

"Then something really weird happened. Right in the middle of beating him up, Richie suddenly stopped and started to cry. He was sobbing and saying, over and over, 'What am I doing? What am I doing?' Then, just as suddenly, he went back to whipping him.

"Howard later went to the police and filed charges, and I understand Richie spent several days in jail. This happened two years ago this summer."



Today, on the outskirts of Cambridge, Howard Kilby lives on the creaky third floor of an old apartment house. In the hallway outside hang several paintings and collages of astrological significance, plus a drawing by Eben Given of Mel Lyman as San Sebastian, arrows protruding from bleeding wounds.

Inside, Howard, his straight hair tied and hanging to the small of his bare back, sat at the dinner table, mulling his words and staring into space.

"I really don't want to talk about it," he said, releasing a heavy, sad breath. "What good would it do? Why mention it? Mel Lyman was good to me. He was a friend when I needed a friend."

"Is it true, about you and the bus?"

Howard thought it over for a moment, then smiled and nodded.

"Yeah. But Mel wasn't responsible. You know, there's certain things you just don't want to talk about.

"I'll say this: I know I don't have any friends on the Hill now."



From the other side of Boston, Richie Guerin laughed vigorously, his fresh, freckled, Melvinish face beaming upward like a high school football coach.

"Yeah, I had some personal problems with Howard," he said. "I went to jail for eight days. I don't know, I didn't know how to talk to the guy. I was on my own trip. He pissed me off and I was gonna get him, you know?

"And like in a rage one night I told him I was going to kill him. You know how you say things like, 'Oh, you motherfucker, I'm gonna kill ya,' one of those things. And he thought I was going to kill him, so he called the police, you know, and they arrested me, and I got thrown in jail and had to go to court."

Richie had to break off for a second and enjoy one of those warm little chuckles only reminiscence can produce.

"He was supposed to check out Mel's bus, and he didn't do a proper job. And I told him, I said, 'Wow, if you did a proper job, how come it doesn't work? You know, it's pretty fucking obvious.' And he said, 'Yeah, well, I did check it out.' And, like, he was just calling me a fucking liar, and I got into that 'Oh, that motherfucker called me a liar'—you know, that silly shit."

"They say you beat him up."

"Matter of fact, he beat *me* up. He was so freaked out that at one point he jumped me and started wailing on me. And I didn't want any part of beating him up, 'cause he's a little dude and he's like a very frail cat. And I didn't want to hurt him, you know? I realized that it wasn't happening on that level, and I passed. I just pushed him away. And, like, I've never really laid a hand on him."

That matter disposed of, Richie sauntered over to the Fort Hill tool shed, one of his most prized areas of authority, situated near

the garages behind Fort Avenue Terrace.

"Each man has to have his own set of tools. He keeps them with him, and like these are the only tools that are shared by all the men," he explained as he entered the shed and pointed out several pieces of elaborate power equipment—a joiner, a lathe, a buzz saw. Then, to his embarrassment and growing annoyance, Richie spied a messy pile of wood chips near the saw blade.

"And when something like this is left here, Bruce Scorpio is responsible—because he has *chosen* to be responsible for these machines. He really loves them. But if he steps out of line one day, if he *blows* it, well, I hate to see that, because I've cut too many boards by hand to get something that whizzes them off in no time fucked up by carelessness."

Richie grabbed some chips in his hand and shook them like an angry bear.

"It's just a lot of crap on here. It should be clean, in order for the machine to be absolutely like brand new. All this stuff should be swept up, and if it's not, you know, I raise hell: 'Who the hell left the shit in the garage?' Man, it's like: 'Who didn't flush the toilet,' you know?" This time there was a touch of wrath in his laughter.

"It's ridiculous to not do a job thoroughly. It's a . . . lack of a person's . . . being very thorough. And the only way you *get* him to be thorough, is to keep after him."

"How do you do that?"

"Whatever's necessary, you know? Like all I gotta do is tell him and he's going to feel awful, and he'll come down here right away. But if he said, 'Well fuck you, man, I don't feel like doing it,' I'd sock him in the teeth. And see if that hurts him enough, you know? I'll do anything to make him feel bad, so that, like, he will do the right thing. I care for the guy so I want him to be right on, I don't want him to be fucking up."

"I don't see much evidence of fucking up around here, but . . ."

"Well, it gets more subtle. The higher it goes, the more subtle it becomes, you know, and you're always striving for more perfection

and greater order all the time."

"So you're always in danger of fucking up?"

"Oh, absolutely! There's never a chance of having it all together, for sure." Richie gloated with enthusiasm. "Never."

While we were on the subject of self-improvement, I figured Richie would be a good person to ask about the vault. He hesitated at first, but then, once again, he really got into it.

"It's . . . uh . . . solitary confinement, you know," he said with a chuckle. "It's usually like, it's a thing you would *choose* to do—if you're so fucked up. And like you sit there and dig yourself."

"Where is it?"

"In the basement over there," said Richie, pointing to the rear of Five and Six. "It's just a concrete room."

"How long do they stay in it?"

"Well, I mean, how long do you need to get yourself together? Paul—do you know Paul, the redhead? He was in there for a while."

"How long?"

"Eight days."

"Are there windows?"

"Unh unh," he said proudly, "you don't know what time of day it is or nothin'!"

"How did he finally get out?"

"He wanted to be out."

"And it changed him?"

"Oh yeah, you could see it, like he's a really together person."

When I asked Richie the nature of Paul's crime, he became defensive again.

"Well, I don't know, it's a very personal thing . . . the kind of thing people misunderstand the most, you know. The vault is just something to make you *feel*, to make you respond, some kind of pressure. Everybody needs a pressure, you know, in some form, to keep them alive, to keep them pushing 100 percent all the time. And like it was created out of a Need, you know?—for something like that."

I asked Richie who was in charge of Fort Hill security.

"Whoever feels responsible for it," he said. "I always feel *personally* responsible for it, you know? I can always *feel* when the guards aren't doing their job right, and I'll sneak up on them and stick my gun in their heads and scare the shit out of them! And a lot of them wake up.

"A good example of how together they are," he said, "is like when Paul . . . well, what Paul did to get thrown in the vault was, he stole one of the cars in Los Angeles, to drive East, right? And people were sent from here and New York. And they intercepted him on the highway! It was in Carmel, New York, and they intercepted him on the highway, got the car back and brought him back here.

"And that's how together it is between all the communities. I mean, even the police can't do that."



Paula Press, her voice trembling and almost tearful, recalled a visit from the Lyman security force when she was living on the Hill with a man named Bob McQuaid.

"The Karma Squad is, if they decide someone is misbehaving or something, and sometimes they'd give you warnings and sometimes they wouldn't, like Bob and I got Karma Squaded. We were cleaning up the apartment late one night, and they came and beat him up. And Bob has a five-year-old son, Kuel, who was there. I kept him in the other room.

"It was David Gude and Richie and maybe Jim Kweskin or George Peper. It was in the kitchen. At first they tried yelling—see, the Karma Squad, there's two ways. Either they come and they really just beat you up and kick you off, or they come and they try to make you *feel.*

"*Feel!*" Paula said the word hatefully, as if it actually had a bitter taste.

"They come and, you know, you get defensive. Because often they're unfair and unjust, so you try to defend yourself, and they say, 'You're just being defensive!'

"So you have to pretend somewhat, make tears come out, and pretend that you're really feeling. And if they don't think you're feeling enough, they'll start to knock you around a little bit, and push you and maybe, you know, punch you, and say, '*Now* are you feeling enough? If you can't feel anything emotionally, maybe this, maybe this will teach you a lesson!'

"At first they talked to him, and he just turned to stone. They started yelling at him, trying to make him break down and cry and stuff. And I was in a fit, crying and everything. They kept using me by saying, 'See what you've done to her? See what you've done to her?' And it was *they* who were doing it to me.

"They punched him until he stopped trying to, until he just, you know, stopped trying to fight back at all. He was like huddled on the floor. He never really tried to fight back.

"So Bob left the Hill and Kuel stayed with me. And Kuel was—his mother had died—Kuel was very dependent on me. I always loved him and he was just beginning to sort of trust me. And then a week later they called Bob back, and said, 'As long as Kuel's on this Hill, there's a part of Bob McQuaid on this Hill. So Kuel has to go.'

"Bob came back and took Kuel, which is probably the best thing because they're all they have, the two of them. But at the time, I mean it was wrenching enough for Bob to leave. I mean that really hurt me—a kid, a five-year-old kid, you know?"



It was to be my last supper with the Community at Fort Hill, and several hinted that it was extremely important for me to attend. They weren't specific, but as we assembled on this recent mid-summer Sunday evening, certainly the air was heavy with events about to break.

For instance I knew that Mel Lyman, who had been living and working on the West Coast for several months, landed at Martha's Vineyard that afternoon. Would he possibly be making an appearance?

And Faith Franckenstein, Kay Boyle's regal, platinum-haired daughter who more or less governed Fort Hill in Mel's absence, was herself leaving the next day to start a community in San Francisco. She sat at the head of the table and occasionally shuffled official looking sheets of paper. What might she have to announce?

And what did David Gude mean when he silenced Paul Williams about the future?

The dinner itself was much like the first one I attended, orchestrated by silences and waxen stares. But after dessert Faith walked to the other end of the banquet table and stood behind a massive silk-lined wood pulpit on which she rested her paperwork. She said she would start by reading a few "bulletins," the old ones first.

The bulletins, it turned out, were historic sets of rules periodically written and issued by Mel Lyman during the life of Fort Hill. Most of them were remarkably specific, regulating habits of diet, physical fitness, sex, sleep, even cleanliness: "To bathe less than once or more than twice a week is sick," went one of the decrees. Many of the listeners had heard them before, it appeared, and seemed to enjoy them as much for their nostalgic as their instructional quality.

Then Faith paused for a moment, looked directly at the Family and slowly picked up a different sort of bulletin, fresh and handwritten. When she was sure of everyone's attention, she began to read:

"This bulletin is to announce that there will be no more bulletins from me. People are so eager to follow a set of rules, it's a security. From now on you must make up your own from your own experience, and if you come across some that you feel would benefit others, then you should type them up and send them around. This is a democracy. I am not the ruler, I am the spirit of democracy."

The group appeared stunned. Almost catatonic.

"All my old rules are only valid if you have found them to be true," Faith read. "Majority rules from now on . . . Rules must be formed from experience and adapted to changing situations,

law must be born organically and formed by the needs of the moment. Common sense is the highest virtue I know of, conscience is the highest ruler. . . .

"I will only step in and make demands if everyone else fails to do their best. We are an experiment in the loftiest form of government humanity has ever evolved, a system of living together where each man has room to develop to his fullest potential, is *totally* responsible for all his actions, and totally responsible *to* everyone else's. . . .

"It can only work if everyone follows the voice of conscience from within and the voice of necessity from without, and that's a very thin line to tread. And that is the only God I *know* of. Mel."

Without another word Faith picked up her papers and returned to her original seat at the table. Already Lou was crying. Faith motioned toward me, saying to the others. "Perhaps you'd all like to tell David what it's going to mean not having Melvin around anymore."

Not having Melvin around anymore. Around where? Fort Hill? Or is Mel abdicating on a higher level? Or is he . . . suddenly I wondered about Mel's health in this his 33rd year.

The answers that came from the table didn't seem to help much. They were spontaneous, sincere, often impassioned; it's just that they didn't seem to relate to each other in any way I could understand.

"To go on painting," said one man.

"It means people getting along with people," said a woman.

"To me the most important thing is caring," said Anna. "To me there's nothing else. I want to serve Melvin, but the only thing I can do is to learn, and that means caring. 'Cause people cared for me."

Of course, you have to remember some of these answers were separated by long silences, maybe a minute, two minutes.

Dvora had her dark vision. "To me Fort Hill is just a ruin, but the ruin is still greater than anything I know."

"Why do you think it's a ruin," interrupted Ed, a ferocious-looking man who at that time was Faith's husband.

"Because it's in pieces."

"I mean Melvin's gone," said another fellow, "so we just have to carry on," an idea that for some reason threw Faith into a rage.

"What ruined this place," she yelled in a menacing manner, "is people like you, people who dig it for what it is! Melvin has never been able to raise it above the level of the people here. Don't say words unless you know what they mean." The poor man said no more that night.

"I feel I've learned to use tools and build," said a man named Bruce, "but I haven't learned a fucking thing."

"Shut up, Bruce," was the response of a woman several seats down. "You're just saying the same thing and you don't mean it." Bruce, crushed, did shut up. Until Ed started yelling at him.

"Is that all there is to it?" asked Ed. "That girl just told you you were full of shit, and you let her get away with it."

"I just said what I felt," protested Bruce, a little confused.

But Ed continued. "She just put her foot in your damn mouth, and you just let her kick you!" Then Ed whipped around to the rest of the stunned table and shouted, "What's everybody afraid of, man?" One guy started to answer, but Ed cut in: "I'm not talkin' to you, give somebody else a chance. What about the rest of you? What are you afraid to say?"

A new, timid girl named Annie finally answered. "I'm afraid to say I don't know. I really want to learn about Mel, and I don't know where to begin."

For some reason, that answer did it. Faith was now soothing and sweet, almost cooing, as she addressed the flock. "Actually, that's where all your responsibility lies. If you do care, you have to share it with people like Annie. That's how simple things have to be now. There is no higher purpose. There is no Mel Lyman." At this remark, Lou, who had been weeping into a kleenex since the bulletin reading, suddenly burst into loud sobs that tended to break up her speech pattern. "The trouble is," she cried, "we

all say we . . . know then we . . . then we . . . don't do anything about it so . . . we better find some other answers . . . answers and . . . find 'em . . . fast 'cause we don't . . . have any time."

It went on for another 15 minutes, but that was the gist of it. Whatever it meant, something monumental appeared to be going on. Mel had issued his last bulletin and was about to make a move.

Afterward I told Faith it seemed like an historic occasion and asked if there was a copy of the bulletin I could have.

"It's all right with me," she said, "but I better get permission. I'm not even supposed to have this one."



The next day I mentioned Mel's last bulletin to Norman Truss, and he broke out laughing.

"You know how many times he's sent that bulletin? About 40 times. He's always leaving the Hill for the last time, but he needs them as much as they need him.

"He's so insecure he has to prove himself every five minutes. God doesn't, but Mel does."

When Faith handed me a copy of the bulletin that afternoon, I noticed to my surprise that it was dated April 28, 1969.



Part IV
Days of Wrath on the Western Front

The sadness of this empty room. A room full of things. Things that represent feelings I have known. Everywhere I cast my eyes I find old feelings. Remember me all my things seem to say. Remember the tears you shed over me, remember the beautiful sunrises I showed you. How many people have I loved? Let me count my things and see. My beautiful memories. Every one of you I embrace, I hold you so dear to my heart, you all make up my heart for without you I would have no feelings and without feelings I would have no life. Come unto me my children is how I feel for my beautiful things, my beautiful people, oh that I could once more lead you all safely home unto my heart and we would all be home. —*Mel Lyman*

After Mel Lyman unloaded his "last bulletin" in April, 1969, relegating the government of Fort Hill in Boston to his followers, his community began to expand nationally in a series of dramatic and opportunistic moves, particularly on the West Coast.

At the same time, however, Mel privately was retreating, increasing the remoteness of his control. The eight-foot-high stone wall around his house at Fort Hill was no longer sufficient shield, and he started traveling between homes on Martha's Vineyard, in New York, and finally in Los Angeles where a $160,000 mansion was purchased for him in the Hollywood Hills.

Now he was free to create without the earthly burdens of day-to-day Fort Hill life, to create *consciously* without worrying about who's editing the Avatar, who's minding the vault, who's to be Karma Squaded, who's naughty and who's nice, without having

to tell 50 dutiful followers when to wash, fuck and wipe their ass.

"I won't have to worry about all the details, and all the little injustices, you know," Mel told writer Paul Williams in June, 1969. "I really had it down to complete control, I was telling people how to live . . . I didn't want to be doing it, but it was my job. It was my job because I was the oldest, and I was the wisest."

More and more Mel removed himself, even from his closest followers, holing up in attics and private rooms except at mealtime. And he was retreating on another front. He was digging deeper into his past, contacting old friends, writing letters, gathering the letters he'd already written, binding them into a book. With the elaborate recording and camera equipment he had collected over the years, he was preserving his childhood—taping thousands and thousands of 78 rpm records, visiting and photographing homes, schools and parks in California and Oregon where he was raised. Perhaps this was not so much a retreat as it was a search.

"There is always an order in life," Mel wrote, "life is the reflection of that order as man is the reflection of God . . . It takes a long time to *find* the meaning in our day to day activities but in reflection we will always detect the moving finger that traced the pattern we have followed, there *is* a plan. Every man is his own unique part of that plan, every life has a purpose. Lives that seemingly were lived with no kind of purpose at all might have simply served the purpose of distinguishing purpose by *lack* of purpose, it all fits together in some crazy way."

Now, midway in our story, the characters and scenes change somewhat, and it might be useful to recall some of the old guys and introduce some of the new:

George Peper, the community's resident photographer and film buff. A former tennis champ, actor and speed freak, he was one of the small band of pioneer squatters who moved to Fort Hill in the mid-Sixties. He toured the country in 1969 as an assistant to Don West, an assistant to CBS President Dr. Frank Stanton; later George toured some of Mel's old haunts for the purpose of this article.

Jim Kweskin, guitar-picking folkie famous for his Jug Band in the early Sixties. Mel Lyman was a member of that group, but later the roles were reversed, Jim joining Mel's band, the Fort Hill Community, eventually becoming their business manager. Recently he has attempted something of a comeback, singing at small clubs and recording a new album in San Francisco—one reason Mel started another community in that city.

David Gude, former Vanguard folk singer and tape editor, now a Fort Hill "heavy." A stoney, gap-toothed man with an unpredictable and schizophrenic wrath, Gude was one of the original Karma Squad members, the one who pulled the gun on Don West. In that capacity he paid a visit not long ago to this publication's offices.

Jessie Benton, folkie daughter of painter Thomas Hart Benton and ex-wife of, respectively, David Gude, Mel Lyman and George Peper. Currently unattached, she is still considered by most to be the "Queen of Fort Hill," certainly the most powerful female influence in the community.

Richie Guerin, another "heavy," the community's master cop, keeper of the vault, architect, guitarist and part-time butler. In 1968 he led the raid on the Avatar office, destroying 35,000 issues of that newspaper. One of Mel's most dedicated followers, he was forced last spring to destroy his own most ambitious creation at Mel's request.

Kay Boyle, author, longtime fighting liberal, and the outside world's most prominent anti-Mel, battling him for years over the possession of two of her children, Faith and Ian Franckenstein. She actually lived for a year at Fort Hill, during the early days when Faith was married to David Gude. Later, much against her will, Fort Hill tried to return the favor, but fortunately she had a good lawyer.

Owen "O.D." deLong, the brilliant political scientist once named by Mel to be his personal Buddha, the "world mind" working with the "world heart." An honors graduate from Harvard who often uses Henry Kissinger as a personal reference, deLong has worked

as a speech writer for Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy and as a professional waiter for Melvin Lyman. He is a master fund raiser. It was after deLong was hired as program director for KPFK-FM in Los Angeles that the trouble there started.

Lisa Kindred, a jovial, hearty-voiced member of the old New York-Boston folksinging circuit, now a frequent performer at small clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area. Mel Lyman backed her on her second Vanguard album, then abruptly stole the tapes, issuing them years later under his own name. She was pissed.

Mark Frechette, rugged, hate-filled star of *Zabriskie Point.* Days after he was discovered by Michelangelo Antonioni he was also discovered by Mel Lyman, and even though the great director testily rejected all of Mel's suggestions for the film, Mark remains one of the community's main hopes for making it big in Hollywood, and, oh yes, one of its biggest single sources of income. After the film, Mark returned to Fort Hill with heroine Daria Halprin, but the relationship dissolved under mysterious circumstances. Today Daria's parents, dancer Ann Halprin and architect Lawrence Halprin, fear for her life and refuse to discuss the matter.

J. C. Lyman, Mel's hard-drinking, traveling salesman father. He was out of town that fateful March day in 1938 when Mel was born in Eureka, California. He recalled that as a child, Mel was "sort of a dreamer."

Dixie Duke, Mel's old grammar school teacher, recently retired, who remembered Mel as a "small, freckle-faced kid, full of the devil." We gave her a big surprise when we visited her in Santa Rosa, California.

Richard Herbruck, the Lyman Family's mysterious producer who suddenly came into being when the group moved West. His, supposedly, were the tapes that started the troubles at KPFK-FM. Yet no one at the time had ever seen him, talked to him, or received any evidence that he was even alive.

An anonymous witness, always good to have one of these in a story, don't you think? This man was an employee of KPFK-FM who personally saw all phases of the violence there. He finally

agreed to talk about it, anonymously, but for a long while was unable to persuade his colleagues to do likewise.

This last year's expansion has brought with it a disturbing trend in tactics, a new kind of violence, directed for the first time against outsiders. Sometimes it is spontaneous and personal, the stomping of a book salesman, the assaults on reporters. Sometimes it is planned and squadron-sized, like the full-scale invasion of KPFK. No one knows the cause, whether the Family violence is born of a sense of success and arrogance, or a sense of defeat and frustration. Or whether it is born of any sense at all.



Time and daylight were running out on Martha's Vineyard, and George, dammit, was having trouble with the acetylene torch. People all over the West Tisbury area were closing up their homes, sitting down for dinner on this recent, misty midsummer Saturday night, but George was way behind schedule. For him, dinner would have to wait. The darkroom plumbing had to be finished, both hot and cold water, the torch was acting up, and now Jessie Benton had just laid another chore on him, a broken wooden chair that must be fixed immediately. "Mel's arriving tomorrow afternoon," she told him, "and it has to be done by then."

George struck on the garage floor and tried the torch again, carefully adjusting the flow of gas. It ignited, George drew back the flame for maximum heat, then it vanished with a pop, like a little hot cough. Shit, he said, the nozzle was getting too old and cruddy, too hard to light. But when he tried it again, he finally succeeded.

Now he took a thin paint brush from a dimestore paper bag, cut its bristles down to a quarter inch, and used it to apply soldering flux to one of the small copper joints that lay before his feet. The flux was needed, he explained, to keep the copper from oxidizing before the solder was applied.

By this time, George Peper, the Lyman Family's handsome,

boy-faced photographer, had become pretty handy at building these darkrooms. He'd built one in Boston, one in New York and two in Los Angeles, wherever Mel might suddenly need to come and work. As film and media in general had grown more important to Mel, so had George, who was now considered one of Mel's closest insiders.

So George had a habit of mixing his lecture on plumbing and soldering with his lecture on the flux of life. "Everything we've done we didn't intend to do," he said as he roasted two pieces of joined pipe with the torch. "Like, we got into film because it was a necessity to get into film. We started living together because it was a necessity to live together, just an organic thing that happened."

Like it was a necessity for Melvin, after issuing his "last bulletin" to Fort Hill in April, 1969, to move to Martha's Vineyard and establish a kind of Berchtesgaden retreat on the property Thomas Hart Benton had given his daughter, Jessie. It was a necessity, late in 1970, to move to the West Coast, to Los Angeles—an "Aries-Capricorn city" with no traditions to bog down one's creativity, a city brewing with every cult yet known to these United States.

And now it was a necessity for Faith Franckenstein, Kay Boyle's lovely, platinum-haired daughter, to leave Fort Hill for San Francisco, to establish yet another community. Mel had found a marvelous recording studio there, said George, where the Lyman Family could make records exactly the way they wanted, and Faith had to find a house where they all could live.

George touched the wire solder to the hot joined pipes and it melted instantly, surrounding the smaller pipe like a thin silver moat.

"It's just amazing," he remarked, "Faith leaving here for San Francisco, just as you're arriving from San Francisco to come here."

"Yes," I said, "it's quite a coincidence." Which made George put down the torch and turn to me with an exasperated look on his face, as if I'd understood none of his lecture.

"There's no such thing as coincidence," he said coldly.

We walked from the garage to the studio next door where Jessie's father once painted. He hadn't painted in it for years, however, and much remodeling was still required before George could use it as a photo studio and darkroom. A two-foot-deep by 40-foot-long trench led from the studio into the darkness, and George used it to crawl underneath the house and make more measurements. The trench had been dug entirely by Fort Hill children, George said.

When we returned to the garage we were greeted by two of the children, Obray and Mario, who had trudged up from the "children's house" several hundred dark yards away. They had come to watch the soldering, but now, as George painted flux on another length of pipe, their attention focused on a new visitor, a huge brown June bug that had flown in from the evening's mist and landed on the garage floor. The insect crawled toward a battery-powered lantern near the entrance, sometimes stopping, sometimes meandering as it explored new marvels of the old cracked concrete.

George noticed it too, and slowly, without turning his head, he reached down and grasped the torch.

"Hey look," yelled Obray at the top of his whisper, "he's gonna burn the June bug." There was cause for excitement, certainly, because the bug was a good inch-and-a-half long, not like an ant or moth that burns crisp and tidy. A bug this size would no doubt boil and smoke and, I feared, smell. Do June bugs have special vocal chords for emergencies like this? Would it somehow, through the flames, protest and sear our consciences?

George lit a match and turned on the gas, It caught. He adjusted the flame to a nice blue white; held it for several seconds, then watched it pop out.

"God protects," he said with a slight, fatalistic smile. The children were disappointed, he could tell, as they watched the bug turn and slowly aim for the outside darkness. Would God wish such an opportunity to be missed?

George struck another match. "One last time," he told Obray

and Mario as they watched, fascinated. This time he let the flame burn longer before making final gas adjustments. The hollow hiss from the nozzle sounded firm and clean, just right for soldering the little critter.

Now George turned toward the June bug, holding the torch in his right hand. He had plenty of time. The bug wasn't moving fast, it wasn't aware of the plan. Easy, easy now, thought George.

Before he could inch forward, however, he heard that telltale little cough. The damn flame was out.

"That's it," he told the kids, setting down the torch.

"God protected it?" asked Obray.

"That's right," said George, "God protected it."

A big horsefly flew in the window so I got the rolled up magazine and slapped him to the floor and he buzzed around on his back and then I really flattened him and it looked like his guts all came out but when I looked closer I saw that it was a bunch of little teeny worms and at first I thought that they were on him to eat him but then I saw that they were his babies I mean HER babies and they squirmed all around and I went and got the bug spray and gave them a good squirt but it didn't kill them, it only seemed to burn them and made them wriggle around all the more and so I lit a match to the whole works but it didn't burn too good so I had to singe each little worm at a time and then I saw some more of them wriggling out of the squashed mother's guts and so I set her on fire and the whole thing was pretty revolting.

—Mel Lyman

Everything you've heard about Mel is true," said Jessie, slicing off a juicy bite of steaming chicken breast. "He does manipulate us, but he doesn't manipulate us for evil. He manipulates us to be what we truly are. He is our soul."

Dinner time at the Martha's Vineyard community, and Jessie, George and I had been discussing Melvin's expertise as an acid therapist. That's how Jessie first met Mel. That's how many people first met Mel, but with Jessie it was a little more romantic. Let's see, this was in 1965 and Jessie was spending the summer with her folks right in the house where we were eating dinner.

She'd been given a vial of Owsley's acid, and she was just sitting there, lonely and waiting for someone to come and guide her on her first trip. When who should appear but the master himself, driving up the winding dirt road in that magic blue VW bus of his. David Gude, Jessie's ex-husband, was with him and Melvin was out scouting for another wife. He had just discovered the divine nature of music and, incidentally, himself at the Newport Folk Festival, and now he needed a woman who could sing. And David remembered that Jessie had a beautiful voice.

"When I first saw Melvin I was scared to death of him," said Jessie. "I sensed something in him that was enormous—I felt the fear of God. I mean, if you don't feel it, you're crazy. There have been times when he actually *glows* and the walls leave the room—that happens a lot."

So you can imagine what he was like under 1500 mikes of Owsley's purest. The trip lasted two days. Mel sang for her, read her his poetry, then took her back to Boston and married her. A few months later they moved onto Fort Hill.

Now Jessie was waiting for him again. Tomorrow afternoon, she said, he would be arriving from San Francisco where he and Jim Kweskin were recording a new album. The sessions had left him wasted, and he needed the rest.

"I mean he really is a delicate balance," said Jessie. "He needs an exact amount of sleep which he has got to get or it's just all over for the day. He has a whole structure: he sleeps eight hours, and when he gets up, he has a cup of coffee. He eats breakfast four hours after he's been up; four hours later he eats lunch, and four hours later he eats dinner.

"He spends the first eight hours of the day waking himself up, and he's got a million machines that help him—vibrators and that kind of stuff. That's why we're building a swimming pool in Los Angeles, you know, it's mainly for Melvin.

"And at a period of eight hours exactly after he gets up—when he's fully awake—that's when he's ready for *conscious creation.*"

Conscious creation, the ability to harness the *spirit* and create

blindly, innocently, *spontaneously* at will. Or something like that. It was Mel's need for a place where he could consciously create that first drove him to Fort Hill. When, after three years, the Hill got too busy and worldly, it drove him to Martha's Vineyard. And now it had driven him to the West, particularly Hollywood.

As Jessie spoke, I looked about the living room in which we were eating and noticed the evidence of that need, evidence that can be seen in nearly every living room of every Lyman community. On the mantel were two bookshelf speakers, reserved exclusively for Mel's records and tapes. From a ceiling beam hung an unrolled movie screen, reserved for his films.

In this particular living room, however, was abundant evidence of another creator, Thomas Hart Benton. His original paintings hung on every wall. Most of them were paintings of Jessie, a haunting, dark-eyed woman who in real life looks a little harder and smaller than the canvas variety.

Jessie was still talking about Melvin's health.

"He had all his teeth pulled out, you know. Three years ago. He had terrible teeth, that's because he loves candy. People used to say that Melvin had two weaknesses; one was candy and the other was women. In that order." Jessie laughed in her own brittle way.

"He hated his teeth. He said they were the only part of your body without spirit, because they didn't grow. He called them rocks in the mouth. The funny thing is now everybody on Fort Hill has lousy teeth, and the longer they stay there, the worse their teeth get."

"You mean Mel wears false teeth?"

"Oh, he never wears them. He has false teeth but he never wears them. Only when he's Richard Herbruck does he wear his teeth."

That name sounded familiar. Wasn't he that producer? . . .

"Richard Herbruck is just somebody we made up," explained Jessie. "Like when Melvin goes out into the world, he wears his teeth and he becomes Herbruck. He's a maniac. Richard Herbruck was the guy who presented those tapes at KPFK. Did you ever

hear those tapes, the introduction to those tapes? It's sheer nonsense, and nobody ever knew. I think somebody at KPFK said he felt it was a little pretentious, right? Pretentious! It was complete nonsense, every bit of it. It was historically incorrect, everything was wrong. And Melvin had done it on purpose."

It didn't make sense. If what Jessie said was true, if those tapes that KPFK was accused of distorting were just a gag, why did the Lyman Family retaliate so viciously? And if Richard Herbruck was a continuing front for Mel Lyman, why was she blowing it by telling me? Could she really be so glib?

"Richard Herbruck is just an outgrowth of this other person that Melvin created years ago," continued Jessie, "this kind of scientific maniac who wrote *Autobiography of a World Savior.* That book's tongue-in-cheek, you know. Melvin was involved with a bunch of scientologists on the East Coast, and he wrote that book for them. I mean, even the title, that's a joke. We do a lot of things like that. We do have our fun every now and then."

Well, no one can begrudge them that, certainly. There's little enough laughter on the Hill. But there were few giggles at KPFK after the boyish pranks of toothy Mr. Herbruck. And many of Mel's followers have reordered their lives around his *Autobiography*, despite its cutie-pie title.

In fact, as Mel has isolated himself more from the community's rank and file, his actions, whimsical or otherwise, appear to have grown harsher and more impulsive. After dinner, Jessie and George told me of two proclamations issued earlier this year that give some idea of how much Mel now controls his family.

According to Jessie, Mel visited the Hill one day and decided there were too many children, too many babies being made. So he declared a year-long moratorium on fucking.

"Really?" I asked. "And everyone obeyed it?"

"Sure," said Jessie. "Well, a couple of people screwed up, so then Melvin ordered all the women to get IUDs. One girl objected so much she ripped hers out with her own hand."

I asked about Lou, the pregnant ex-nun who runs the Fort Hill

school, and Jessie answered, as if it was a matter of rationing food, "Yeah, well, she's gonna have to have an abortion." (It turned out, of course, that Lou was much too far along for that sort of thing. She's expected to break Mel's commandment next month.)

So Mel's into celibacy—hardly seems fair after all the women *he's* gone through. But then, the Need always changes, doesn't it? Such a moratorium would certainly account for the strange atmosphere of somberness and tension I felt during my visit to the Hill.

Yet, there was something else—a feeling of urgency, of feverish activity. I thought about the construction work and David Gude's admonition to Paul Williams, "Don't talk about the future." What was going on? Was some major change taking place?

"Things are always changing," quipped George. "You can never . . ."

"No but, you know, something bigger than that. Paul Williams mentioned something about maybe renting or selling the buildings."

For a good ten seconds George gazed down at the tablecloth, as if hidden somewhere in the white fabric were the words he needed. As usual, his eyes looked very tired; he's a handsome, healthy-looking man, but his eyes always seem dazed, as if he'd just stepped from a wind tunnel.

"Actually . . . something *has* happened. . . ." he started slowly, straightening up and scooting forward. A former actor, George can really dramatize a story when he's in the mood.

"You came at just the right time. If you had come two weeks earlier, I can guarantee no one would have even spoken to you. There was that much pain and sadness."

Across the table Jessie watched and listened to George with no expression on her face.

"What happened on the Hill was this. For years we had been working on a thing called the Magic Theater. Part of the thing was going to be that recording studio that you saw at the top of Five and Six. But it would have been much more than that. It would have been a place through which Melvin could bring

his creation to the world—his music, his films, everything."

George took my notepad and started sketching a floor plan of the Magic Theater. The theater itself was a two-story building connecting Four-and-a-Half—formerly Mel's walled house—with the rear of the duplex, Five and Six. On the second floor of the theater was a large projection booth that also served as an engineer's control room for the adjacent recording studio. In fact, a tilted picture window, which today provides a magnificent view of the south end of Boston, was supposed to provide a view of a full-sized engineer's console.

Designed, of course, by Richie Guerin with his usual flair for flexibility and multiple function, the three-building complex would also have included a sound stage, storage rooms for equipment, props and film, two adjacent spiral stairwells for entrance and exit, a lobby, a kitchen, and a place for Mel to live.

And one feature I thought particularly visionary. George sketched a tiny square in the middle of the control room.

"Suspended from the control room was this thing called the Cockpit," he explained. "It was just big enough for one man, and Melvin could have crawled in there, and, without being seen, he could have controlled everything. I mean, it was like a Master Control, and he could have run the films, the music, the lights, everything at once."

By last spring, after three years' work, the Magic Theater was nearly completed—all but the roof and the interiors. That's when Mel paid a visit to the Hill.

"What happened was that the completion of the Magic Theater was taking too long, it had become a dream," said George, starting now to get a little vague. "It had become unreal . . . I mean, the dream had become more important than the Need . . . it was no longer organic, you know? I mean, something happened, something very complex, involving certain personalities . . . there's no point in going into it.

"I mean, what Melvin said when he told the people to tear down the Magic Theater was that he wanted to eliminate all dreams

of creation, because that's what the creation had become—a dream."

Unfortunately, that's as specific as George would get. Or, perhaps, *could* get. He sounded genuinely troubled and confused, and he may not have known the real reasons himself.

Dinner was over and it was way past midnight. I walked to the children's house where I was to sleep, figuring, well, tomorrow afternoon Mel will arrive and I can get the reason direct from Master Control.

But I was wrong. As I was preparing for bed, George appeared and said, "Jessie and I have been talking and . . . well, we think you better go back to the Hill tomorrow morning. Mel's very tired, he just couldn't handle any interview, you know? And, I mean, really, you're not ready to see him yet."

I didn't see why not, but George said I still had too many concepts, that I hadn't shown a personal enough need, that I wasn't *alive* enough. I didn't know what he was talking about, of course; it was necessary to see Mel for the story. I told George I thought he was making a mistake, but it was no use. Jessie was adamant.



Back on the Hill I asked Richie about the Magic Theater, but it didn't help much. "Well, we no longer need the studio to record in," he said. "We no longer need a theater to show movies in because we're not doing movies right now. And what we do need is to finish fixing up the houses on a very basic level, to put in kitchens and bathrooms and proper staircases and windows, you know? And when you have so many things on a basic level that are incomplete, you can't be creative. The creation can't happen unless everything is in perfect order."

"Was that the mistake, that you were doing things out of order?"

"No, but the situation that came about was, like, the people who were working on it, they weren't totally into it. And the reason they weren't totally into it was because it wasn't necessary anymore, you know? There were more necessary things happening around

them, which they neglected."

"Like what?"

"Well, like the people they lived with, situations that existed on a personal level. People were confused and asleep and unconscious of what was really happening, and something real had to come along to wake them up.

"And that's what Melvin always does, you know? He immediately does something very, very constructive in a destructive way. And tearing down that structure out there is a much more real thing to the man who tore it down than putting it up, you see? I mean, putting it up is an idea, tearing it down is a reality.

"Like I worked on this thing for two and a half years, and the reality of it not being there . . ."

Richie gazed at the bare cement foundation next to Four-and-a-half and smiled. But his voice grew sad. "I tell you, man, the first three days when we started tearing it down, it was like . . . complete silence, nobody had anything to say to anybody. It was just agony. And you'd be working along, as fast and quickly and accurately as you could to do the proper job, taking out every nail, and all of a sudden you'd not be working and you'd drift off for one second to think about what you were doing. And the tears would come to your eyes, man, and you couldn't even see, and you'd have to blow your nose and stop and . . ." Richie chuckled. ". . . and then get back into it again. That's why we got it down so fast."

What would happen to the foundation, I asked.

"I have no idea, I really don't. Maybe it'll have to come down too. I have to wait and see what Melvin wants to do with these houses, you know, what he needs them for."



Abandon hope all you who enter here:

Fort Hill needs workers. We guarantee you nothing. No wages. No advances. We give you room and food. Who do you work for now? Come work for The Lord. The rewards, if any, are not of this earth.

Call Kurt at 617-445-4566 **American Avatar**

—from a recent recruitment poster showing 13 Fort Hill men standing gleefully on the ruins of half-demolished House Four. Kurt said they printed several thousand posters, got two phone calls, one from a "14-year-old Aries" who read it on the men's room floor of a Chicago Greyhound station.

Several weeks later I received one last clue to the mystery of the Magic Theater when Paul Williams called after his escape from the Hill.

"Here we were supposedly building this thing for Mel to show movies in," said Paul, "and we were blowing it absolutely on a basic level about caring about people. I mean, the reason that Bob McQuaid left the Hill is 'cause nobody gave a damn."

"Bob McQuaid?"

Suddenly Paul hesitated. "Oh, I thought you . . . already knew that part of the story. Well I . . . I probably really shouldn't say anything more about it 'cause, you know . . . I mean, Mel always said never to talk about Fort Hill unless you knew exactly what you were saying."

And that's all Paul would reveal. Some escape.

Whatever the specifics, it may have been that Melvin, by last spring, had simply lost interest in the project. He was now firmly entrenched in Hollywood, living in luxury, surrounded by celluloid and lost hippie souls, embarked on a plan of Western conquest envisioned even before the first ground was broken for the Magic Theater.

Cut to Boston in the summer of 1968. A scruffy young man with angry, furry eyebrows walks the streets of Roxbury, a baby strapped to his back. He is divorced, broke and drained of hope. His name is Mark Frechette and he is alone. No wonder—it's three in the morning.

"I was a self-respecting hippie dropout bum." Mark recalled. "Then I started reading the Avatar and it changed my life."

That's right, folks. In just one month Mark Frechette was discovered by the men he now considers two of the greatest film directors in the world—Michelangelo Antonioni and Melvin Lyman. The fight between these two directors to control Mark lasted ten months

and is one of the more interesting stories surrounding *Zabriskie Point.*

First Mark was discovered by Antonioni. Just how is one of the Lyman people's favorite legends, so we might as well let them tell it and get it over with. The following is from the last edition of American Avatar:

"The summer of 1968 was an eventful season, the primaries, Columbia, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the televised furor of the Democratic Convention. In the midst of the excitement and the talk of youthful revolution came Michelangelo Antonioni to America to create a film about the violent revolution he saw coming. Antonioni's search for the perfect SDS cop-killer extended across the land; it was a small but well-noted event of the summer. Hundreds of young actors lined up in front of places like the Electric Circus in New York to be poked and questioned and tested to see if the part could really be theirs. It was said the Great Director was seeking someone with the incisive intellect of a Marxist grad student and the personal attitude of an Algerian bomb thrower." (*Ed. note: Frechette was neither.*)

"Meanwhile, oblivious to the hopes of so many of his contemporaries, 20-year-old innocent Mark Frechette stood anxiously on a downtown street corner in Boston, scratching his beard, engrossed in an agrument between a sailor and his date at a bus stop. The girl was getting nasty and bitchy as young girls do, and Mark was growing frantic waiting for the sailor to finally assert his manhood and belt the dumb broad across the mouth.

"As the argument intensified, a horror-stricken busybody in a fourth floor apartment took judgment and a flower pot in hand and prematurely ended the dispute by braining the sailor with a geranium. The insensitivity of this intrusion caused so much indignation in the idealistic Frechette, he shook his fist at the fourth story window, 'You motherfucker!' he screamed.

"Suddenly he was grabbed from behind. 'How old are you?' his accoster wanted to know. 'I'm 20,' Mark said, bewildered, trying to figure out what was going on. The man shoved Mark into his

limousine next to a pretty young girl. 'He's 20 and he hates!' he said gleefully."

You can see why the Lyman Family would dig that story—and Mark Frechette. And Mark had already been digging the Lyman Family. He didn't really know any members, but he liked what Mel had to say in the Avatar. And sometimes when his young son would wake up crying at three in the morning, he'd take him for a walk around the Fort Hill tower where it was so nice and peaceful.

"After reading Mel in the Avatar, I realized if I was gonna do something with my life, it just meant digging in," said Mark. "You can't do anything if you don't have the basics together. I mean, I might have come to those conclusions anyway, in 20 or 30 years, but Mel really made me see what a fool I'd been. It made me grateful that the Hill was there, that Mel was there.

"So I decided to get my shit together and somehow try to repay these people who had helped me."

The opportunity presented itself soon enough after Mark got the part in *Zabriskie Point.*

"I went up to see Melvin a couple days before coming out to the Coast. I'd heard he was interested in filmmaking and I thought maybe I could get him a good deal on some film equipment."

Actually, Mark had tried to see Mel a couple of times before he got the part, but without much luck. This time, Mel welcomed him inside his house, gave him a complete set of Avatars and talked to him the entire afternoon.

"As soon as I walked in, there was this humming in my ears," said Mark. "I can't explain it. I mean the whole damn room was humming. Mel sat me down and explained how much films meant to him, how important it was to make contacts in Hollywood.

"He said I could make Hollywood the next step in the evolution of Avatar, I could make those contacts. The longer I sat there, the more I realized he was right—he sure made me want to help, I'll tell ya.

"As I left, he said, 'When you get out there, keep in touch.' "

Although Mark arrived in Hollywood in July, shooting didn't actually start until September. During that time he met the heroine of the film, Daria Halprin, a soulful-eyed woman from San Francisco.

"She was so beautiful, she'd knock you right off your feet," Mark said. "I guess I was nailed to the floor when I first saw her, otherwise I would've been blown over." At first, according to Mark, they didn't hit it off at all. "Mostly we just stared at each other. For months I was just completely overwhelmed by her."

Then came September 22nd, 1968, apparently an important date for Mark, one of the few he remembers. Of course, it had nothing to do with the film. That was the date Mark flew back to Fort Hill and stayed up all night with Mel.

"That was the first time I heard his music," recalled Mark. "We stayed up and smoked some of his fantastic weed, and listened to his music. All the music he ever recorded he played for me that weekend."

Most of it was music Mel had recorded privately, stuff he'd done with Jessie, plus a lot of instrumentals—"pure music." The two men spent the weekend discussing music and film, art and creation. They talked about how Antonioni was trying to capture the spirit of America, young America, in *Zabriskie Point.* And, why, isn't that just what Mel had already done with his music? Sure, it was a popular fad these days to use electronic rock in youth oriented films. But that's just a passing, surface kind of thing—we're talking about the *spirit of* America, the *reality* of America. Think about it; wouldn't Mel's music make a perfect soundtrack for the film?

On Monday Mark flew back to Hollywood with Mel's personal tapes under his arm. After much coaxing he got Antonioni to sit down one night and listen to them.

"It's hard to say what he thought of them," said Mark. "I noticed that during one of the more spirited pieces he was twitching in his chair quite a bit. I mean, he had a terrible slant on what was happening here in America; he had a real European outlook. I tried to make him aware of what was happening here. I told him

about Fort Hill, about Avatar. I told him about Mel and what he meant to this country. But he never understood. It was really frustrating."

When *Zabriskie Point* was finally released it included the music of Pink Floyd, Kaleidoscope, Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead, the Stones, and the Youngbloods—plus "Tennessee Waltz" by Patti Page.

As the shooting continued, Mark tried another tactic. He'd casually deposit a copy of the Avatar on the set just before the cameras were ready to roll, usually a copy with Mel's picture on the cover.

Antonioni would storm onto the set, pick up the issue and yell, "What's *his* picture doing in *my* picture?"—chucking the damn thing away. Didn't matter; Mark had that whole stack Mel had given him and the next day another one would mysteriously appear before the cameras.

If Mark was unable to convert Antonioni, he was doing a little better with Daria. The two were growing closer and closer and by Christmas were lovers as much off the set as on. She was still a little skeptical about Fort Hill, but in March, "after eight or nine months of my ranting and raving she had a vision. She saw the face of Melvin. She must have recognized it from the Avatar cover since she'd never met him before. A few days later she made her decision for Mel and agreed, once the movie was finished, to live with Mark on Fort Hill.

"It happened while we were shooting up in Berkeley," said Mark. "We were in her apartment, having a fight. I was mad about something, I forget, and all of a sudden she just started shaking all over, crying and afraid, and something clicked. She just made up her mind right away. Suddenly she realized that what I'd been tryin' to tell her all these months was the truth."

And that made something click inside Mark. He'd been growing more and more pissed off at what he considered the basic dishonesty of the film, its portrayal of American youth as left-wing *political* revolutionaries rather than *spiritual* revolutionaries like Mel described.

"I got fed up with the whole thing. I got tired of getting up every morning to go and work in what was essentially a lie. So I just took off one day—let's see, it was March 15th." That was the day Mark failed to appear on the set.

Meanwhile, back at Fort Hill, Mel Lyman was in his walled house working, consciously creating, making plans for his triumphant invasion of Hollywood. Then he heard a knock on his door. Mark barged in.

"The whole thing was a big Hollywood lie, it wasn't real," he told Mel, laughing. "So I put a stop to it. I quit. I left them completely in the dark, I really threw a monkey wrench in the works!" Now Antonioni would feel the power of Fort Hill, he told Mel. Now Mark could devote his full time to the community.

Melvin patted him on the back and hastily ushered him to his living room couch. He offered him a joint. Mel was smiling, but inside, his mind was racing. Shit, what had this crazy bastard gone and done? His sentiments were right, of course, but what about the evolution of Avatar? What about Hollywood?

"Mel told me I should be cautious about this kind of thing," Mark said later. "He said such actions didn't necessarily produce anything, that I should be very careful."

At Mel's suggestion, Mark finally agreed to teach Antonioni just a temporary lesson. For six days he refused all calls from MGM. Production came to a halt. Then Antonioni himself phoned Fort Hill.

"I told him he wasn't making a film about any America *I* knew," said Mark. "I told him things just had to change before I would come back." Antonioni was panicked; the film was already five months over schedule. But so was Melvin.

Finally, Mark agreed to return and finish the picture—but only after Antonioni promised to spend ten days reshooting dialogue Mark thought too political, and to visit Fort Hill as soon as the movie was done. He kept the first promise, although the new dialogue was never used in the film, but not the second. Urgent business suddenly forced him to return to Europe.

When in April the shooting was over, Mark and Daria, alone at last, drove across the country to Fort Hill. It was a very happy time in their lives. They were the center of attention on the Hill, and they were in love. That sort of thing.

But, as Mel teaches us, that sort of thing doesn't last long. The following September Mark left for Yugoslavia to shoot a picture with Francisco Rossi, leaving Daria alone on the Hill. And here the story gets cloudy. In the first place, we don't have Daria's side of it; she's currently in Mexico, shooting a film with Dennis Hopper and unavailable for comment.

And her parents, San Francisco architect Lawrence Halprin and dancer Ann Halprin, refuse to say anything except that they are still afraid for her life. But from fairly reliable, anonymous sources we know that life on Fort Hill gradually became very trying for Daria. She may have been too independent for their tastes, but several people have mentioned violent encounters, some physical, between Daria and the Fort Hill women, particularly Jessie.

And there was this story from a publicist at MGM:

"One day Daria called me and said she was looking for work. She was living with the New York community at the time and said she had no money. Apparently they had taken it. She asked if she could do some TV commercials. I said absolutely.

"Without any trouble I lined up some jobs for her. But when I called her back in New York, she wasn't around. They said Daria had to be sent back to Fort Hill for retraining, that she was too much of an individual."

After Mark returned from Yugoslavia, their relationship began deteriorating. "By the spring of '70, things were really changing," he said. "It finally got to be a big drag, it just wasn't goin' nowhere." Mark tends to get conveniently vague about the details, but apparently it was the Hill, not personal disenchantment that broke them up.

"I mean, people on the Hill have to learn to put Melvin and the community ahead of themselves, and she just couldn't do that," he explained.

In July, 1970, Mark, Daria, and several other Hill people flew to Hollywood and rented a house on Edinburgh Avenue, sort of a pioneer outpost to start the Lyman Family's western expansion. Mel joined them in September and, as Mark recalls, "that sort of brought it all to a head."

A few days later, Daria left the community and moved into the home of a nearby girlfriend. She told Mark she would wait for him to join her. To everyone's surprise he did.

"The things that she said always carried a lot of weight with me," said Mark. "But it was a terrible situation. I was really a basket case—boy, I was torn."

Within a week there was a knock on Daria's door and three Lyman people entered, two men and a woman. They handed a small envelope to Mark. It was a ticket to Boston. He seemed relieved that the decision had been made for him and left immediately.

"Somewhere deep down inside I knew what I would really do is go back east," he said, "go back and let time wash away the pain."

Apparently the Family became furious at Daria for fucking Mark's mind and tempting him to leave the community. According to one friend, "Daria was terrified. They came after her and threatened to beat her up. She kept calling home, saying she was afraid she was gonna get killed." Twice Daria and her roommate moved in order to avoid the Lyman Family. When she split from the Edinburgh house, she left her Peugeot, but never returned to get it.

"I don't know if she'll ever come back," said Mark, sighing. "There's a chance, I suppose, but I don't know. She just didn't want to give what was asked of her."

Mark Frechette now lives in Los Angeles at the Sierra Bonita house. Two months ago he went to visit Daria while she was passing through town, but she wasn't in. He left a copy of Mel's new book.



Now Mel was finally established on the West Coast, but the Edinburgh Avenue house was actually too small. It was OK for writing his book, but he would need more room—and more people—before he could get into really *heavy* conscious creation.

So he sent people out to scout around Hollywood for other real estate. And then he started thinking . . . why limit ourselves to Hollywood? Sure there are millions of lost souls down here—plenty of work to do—but there are millions up north too. Shit, San Francisco is the hippie capital of the world. And don't we know someone with a house up there, one that we could use? . . .



"It was in October or November of last year that the occupation here took place," said Kay Boyle, sitting in her quiet, three-story home six blocks from the corner of Haight and Ashbury. "I was in Virginia as a writer-in-residence. And my son, Ian, called me one day and said that he was coming out to San Francisco from Roxbury. And I was very pleased because I thought it meant that he was leaving the community there.

"I believe he was never very happy there. He was one of the lower echelon people, and all the real jobs of drudgery were assigned to him, as to some others. He was not allowed to eat dinner sometimes if he hadn't finished sanding or waxing the floor, which seemed to me an extraordinary standard to have in a community of love and understanding of others.

"At any rate, he said he was coming out here, and I said I'm very happy and your apartment—which is downstairs where he has his Steinway and his books and everything—is waiting for you. The rest of the house is rented. And he said, 'Oh yes, I know that.' And I said, well, you know, just stay there and do whatever you want, but the people who are there have rented the house until June."

A week or two later, however, Kay was awakened at 7 AM by a call from her tenants. That's 7 AM in Virginia—4 AM in San Francisco.

"They said that my son had moved in with a number of people; that they had closed the doors of the sitting room and the dining room, which did belong to the people who had rented the house; had given notice to one of the students who lives there. They announced there were going to be great changes.

"Well, I was far away and this was very distressing. I felt a great obligation to the people who lived there. The whole hall apparently was blocked with electronics equipment and things. The people who rented the house could not come in easily. They were afraid to come home at night. They had to go out and eat, they couldn't use their kitchen because the community people were using the kitchen."

In charge of the occupation were David Gude, Kay's ex-son-in-law, and a fellow named Owen deLong. When Kay asked them to leave, they refused.

"So I called my lawyer, Bob Treuhaft, and I called friends of mine who lived nearby. One of them, a black man who lives up the street, came down and said to them, 'Look, you can't do this, this house is rented to people. You've taken their telephone, their sitting room, their dining room, you can't do it.' And after he left, one of the Lyman people said, 'Well, we got rid of *that* big black nigger.'

"David Gude talked to me on the phone and accused me of being a capitalist, that I wished to hold onto property just for my own . . . indulging my own whims. He said, 'We are going to have that house if we have to burn it to the ground!'

"And I wrote him a letter, I said this house has been a refuge for runaway girls from Haight Street, for men coming out of jail for the first time—I mean, it's a terrible thing, a man who's been in jail, say, eight years and he gets his first 72-hour pass out, it's like being born again, it's terrifying—but this house has had real purpose, you know? But not the purpose of being taken over and held as a fortress for a really demented group of people."

Finally, Treuhaft devised a plan to temporarily sell the house to a friend of Kay's for $1. Then he served legal notice on the

Lyman family, forcing them to retreat from the premises.

"And the people of this house," said Kay, "the students who live here, who knew my son before and are very devoted to him, they said that when he really knew he had to go, he smiled for the first time since he'd been here. Because I feel that he has been a captive, a victim of this strange fascist philosophy, that he had wished to get out for years. And when the line was drawn, and he knew he could not abuse the responsibility of . . . his *home*, everything he owned—I mean, the place is *his*, the house is going to be his when I die—I think when he realized that he could not play this horrible role that he'd been forced to play, that he was relieved.

"And he got a job, he worked for four months, he lived with friends, he did not go back to the commune. He told people, told friends, he said, 'For the first time in four years I'm a free man again!' "

Kay Boyle stared across the large, formal living room now empty of the Lymans, of their equipment, of her children. And when she spoke again, she spoke softly and more slowly.

"And then, finally, in April of this year—Ian had been free for almost six months—they came after him, the Los Angeles group came after him. And he went back. They persuaded him, or forced him, I don't know what their methods are. They said he had to do penance for what he had done, that he had failed to get this house. So he was sent down to the Tenderloin district, to a flophouse there, to meditate. For a week. In the dark. In silence. To meditate upon his sins."



"We are the hope of the new age," confided Jim Kweskin in the attic studio of the Family's newly purchased Hollywood mansion. "The great music is in us and coming out of us. That's why we're in L.A., to put the Spirit back in films, in music. The Spirit's there but nobody's using it."

At least, not like they used to in the old days, said Jim as he

opened one of several huge wooden trunks that lay on the attic floor. Inside were hundreds of 78 rpm records, each one hand-washed, treated with silicone and packed between thin foam rubber for protection against earthquakes.

"Melvin's spent years collecting these records," he said. "We got everything from Slim Whitman to Al Jolson. The Spirit that was in music at that time was unbelievable—none of this 16-track, technical electronic gimmickry."

Kweskin didn't know how many records were in the boxes, but there must have been at least 30 or 40 feet worth. Some of the trunks were labeled "Bing Crosby," "Crosby seconds," "Hank Williams seconds," etc.

"Too many people are wasting time and money playing bad music," said Jim, leaning against a new Dolby recording system just bought by Mel. "If people would hold it in until they absolutely had to play, the music would be great. That's why our album is so great—we waited three years to make it."

He was referring to *Jim Kweskin's America*, the album he and Mel were in the process of remixing in San Francisco. A few miles north, in Burbank, an executive for Warner Brothers Records chatted, somewhat skeptically, about the music they'd waited three years to get from Jim.

"It, uh . . . it's not like his other albums," said the executive, who asked to remain anonymous. "It sounds like a bunch of hymns—stuff like 'Old Black Joe' and 'The Old Rugged Cross.'

"Jim's kind of a strange guy to deal with, you know. One day he brought the tapes in to play for me, and right off he gave me a 20-minute lecture on how to thread the tape machine. Very intense guy.

"He played me the tapes, and during one of the songs, I think it was 'Old Black Joe,' I got a phone call. And Jim freaked, I mean really *freaked*, insisted I start the whole thing over again when I got off the phone."

To give me a taste of what Jim was up to these days, the executive put on the album. Pretty somber stuff. On several of the cuts,

particularly "Dark as a Dungeon," I noticed a strange, warbly falsetto that sounded like one of the Muppets on *Sesame Street.*

"You know who that is?" asked the executive. "Mel Lyman."

He recalled a curious request Jim had made the time he came to see him.

"He said the producer needed a first-class ticket from New York to San Francisco, for the session. I said, 'Boy, that's news to me, I'd never heard of any producer.' He said yeah, there was one, and he insisted he had to fly first-class."

"What was the producer's name?"

"Let me think . . . I'd never heard of him . . . Herbruck . . . Richard Herbruck, that was the guy."

At Pacific High Recorders in San Francisco, engineer Phill Sawyer remembered a similar encounter that happened after the session.

"Jim and Mel came in to give me the album credits," he said. "They told me to put down 'Mixed by Phill Sawyer, Produced by Richard Herbruck.' I said, 'Who's that?' There hadn't been any producer in the studio. But they insisted I put it down anyway."

Last month Warner Brothers finally released the album. It's probably too early to gauge the response, but reportedly Fritz Richmond, a former member of the Jug Band, heard it and said, "Jim used to be in the business of waking people up. Now he's in the business of putting them to sleep."

Actually, Jim Kweskin and his favorite backup group, the Lyman Family, did bring Warner Brothers another album during the past three years, and it was released in January, 1970. It was called *American Avatar—Love Comes Rolling Down*, featuring "The Lyman Family with Lisa Kindred." It had an unusual cover, Mel Lyman's silhouette, and an unusual history, having in fact been recorded at Vanguard Records in the mid-Sixties, when David Gude was still a tape editor there.

"That record ended my career at Vanguard," David said later. "It was a hell of a record—really a miracle. Lisa Kindred had a contract with Vanguard, and Melvin was a friend of hers, had known her for quite a while. He knew Lisa was going to make

a record so he asked her could he back her up. Lisa *loved* Melvin and she said sure.

"So we made that record, and the musicians went home, and Melvin sat down and we edited the tapes, we programmed them, we processed them, Eben Given made the cover, Mel went home and wrote the notes. By the end of the week—it took us exactly one week—we had the complete product."

That's when the trouble started with Maynard Solomon, Vanguard president, said David.

"I went and presented it to my boss, and he didn't like it. He thought the harmonica was too loud, there was too much Melvin and not enough Lisa. He looked at it in these very business-like terms. He liked the record, I think, but he wanted to put Lisa out front and make her a star, 'cause that was the only way he knew how to make a record. Melvin didn't care about any of that."

Gude sighed, revealing that gap he has in his teeth.

"And so I argued with my boss for a long time. He wanted to make changes, and Melvin said absolutely not, you know. And everything Melvin said I recognized as the truth. Melvin was right and Maynard was wrong. I did everything Melvin told me to do, and finally I got fired because of it. Mel told me to go back and erase the originals, which is *the* cardinal sin in the recording industry, like a photographer destroying his negatives. So I left them with a mono copy of the record, 'cause that was the one thing they couldn't change much at all, a mono mix."

In other words, Maynard couldn't change the levels between Mel's harp and Lisa's voice.

"In fact," David continued, "we're still big advocates of mono over stereo. I mean stereo—at the present stage of recording—stereo does give you a certain clarity that mono does not give you, but you're still dealing with one source. The music itself comes from one source.

"Always, in any art you're expressing a oneness, whether you find it in a movie—watch a love scene in a movie and everybody's crying; they're all feeling the same feeling, that same oneness feel-

ing—and that's what is so fascinating about art and about music in this case. Everybody who listens to it, they all feel one thing, and they all feel that one thing at the same time. And that one thing, of course, is . . . it's God."

David laughed good-naturedly.

"I didn't tell Maynard about that."



Today Lisa Kindred, a pretty, down-to-earth woman, mainly plays small clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area, living a quiet North Beach life with her old man, a child and some cats. She tells a somewhat different version of David Gude's story.

"Yeah, that whole album was a weird trip," she recalled. "I was living in Cambridge when I first met Mel. This was about '64, I guess, and the Jug Band was together. We played together a lot, at the Club 47, places like that. Mel would come over with his friends, and they'd sit around and smoke dope. I don't smoke myself, I'm allergic to it, but he used to smoke more dope than anybody I met. I remember he used to get really ripped and come out to the kitchen and eat dog biscuits. He said they were good for his teeth. He was a very interesting person, very strange.

"Anyway, the album was supposed to be called *Kindred Spirits.* At that time there was no such thing as the Lyman Family. At that time it was still my album. The record could have been better, you know, if David Gude had known what he was doing. He set up the session, and he'd do things, like he'd put Mel's harp and my voice on the same track.

"I was supposed to go to California, and just before I left I went to hear the tapes. David had told me the tapes were great, just great. I thought they were crappy. The mix was all wrong. There was too much harp, for one thing. So I went to California and sort of forgot about the whole thing.

"And a few weeks later I got a call from Maynard Solomon. He said, 'You won't believe this, but David has stolen the stereo master tapes.'

"So I figured that was that. I just wrote the whole thing off. And then years later, I was living out here in California, I got a call from a girlfriend of mine. She said, 'Guess what. That album you made is out. It's on Warner Brothers.' I couldn't believe it. I hadn't heard from anyone all this time. I didn't hear anything from Warner Brothers. Finally, three months later, the people at Warner Brothers gave me a copy. It was called *American Avatar.* I said to myself, 'I know Mel is an Aries with a God complex, but this is too much!' "

"How did it sound?"

"It sounded just like the tapes. I think if it had been mixed right, it could have been a good album. There was some very good stuff on it. But as a whole . . . it sounded like a real nice home tape, you know? It had no great message. Just a bunch of people having a good time.

"All I ever got were the fees for the recording session. About $400. It would have been fine if they'd owned up and told me what they were doing up front. But to do what they did—I think it's against the law, isn't it? I mean, I ended up being a side man on my own album!"

After pouring some coffee and brown sugar into a heavy mug, Lisa thought for a moment, then said, "You know that album *Creole Belle* by Eric Von Schmidt? It's on Prestige, and Mel plays on it. And now that I think about it, there's not enough of Eric on it. There's too much harp."



On the inside cover of *American Avatar*, next to a photograph of the Fort Hill tower at sunset, Mel Lyman wrote these album notes:

"I've been waiting to get this record released for three years and it is finally only possible now because I played the tapes for Mo Ostin a few months ago and he loved them. Everyone I have ever played these tapes for has been deeply moved, it is great music. The force that drew us together to record this music is the

same force that is always evidenced in great works of art, and like all great works of art this music was created to elevate men, we were merely the instruments . . . I have marveled at these tapes for years and have never ceased to find more and more in them, more grace, more perfection, more magic, more God. And now I have passed them on to Mo and he is passing them on to you in the form of a record album. This is no album, it is a miracle."

Maybe so, but today Mo Ostin, head of Warner Brothers Records, refuses to talk about the album or its dubious origins, or about anything connected with Mel Lyman. For a period of two months—several times a week and several times a day—we called his office in Burbank. We wrote him. But he never replied.

Finally we settled for a stand-in—Stan Cornyn, who runs Warner's creative services department. He said that when Kweskin presented the Lisa Kindred tapes to Warner Brothers, no questions were asked.

"Mo has a basic faith in his talent," Cornyn explained. "So when that package and tape was delivered to us, we took it as it is. We consider ourselves an artist-oriented company, and that means that we work under the assumption that when tapes or records come in, that's that. We've got to assume that.

"I mean, artists are sometimes incredibly ahead of the rest of the world. Sometimes they're not so bright. You've got to take the good with the bad."

Apparently the world was not quite ready for the album *American Avatar.* It sold 1764 copies, of which 1000 were bought by Jim Kweskin.



These old sides are sure taking me on a trip . . . And Ray Charles said "What kind of a man are you" and I sat in my stuffy little room on 30th St. and played "The Great Pretender" and cried and looked all over Sanchez Street for pretty little Sophie "Lost in the Night" by Charles Brown and I found her and "Let's Make Up" by the Spaniels and "Be Mine or a Fool" by the Penguins and then she was in my room and I didn't come back to that cold empty world but she listened to Johnny Ace singing "The

Clock" while I went fishing and the Dream Weavers sang "It's Almost Tomorrow" and Miss Sophie was gone and San Diego was dark and Mr. Lucero sang "Are You Satisfied" and I wanted "Only You". . . .

—from Mel Lyman's 'Mirror at the End of the Road'

Fort Hill photographer George Peper had an assignment; he was to drive to Santa Rosa, where Mel lived as a young boy, and spend the day, Saturday, shooting pictures of Mel's past—an empty park bench where Mel once sat, a vacant lot where Mel's house once stood. He must have shot a hundred different holy places.

While driving to the quiet, railroad-track town fifty miles north of San Francisco, George briefed me on the latest news headlines from the Lyman Family: One, that they were buying a 280-acre farm near Marysville, Kansas; two, that Mel had received a prison letter from Charles Manson, and three, that Mel now had four wives, one in each community—Heidi in Boston, Adele in San Francisco, Eve Chayse in New York, and her sister Gail in Los Angeles.

"It's one reason why he keeps traveling," snickered George.

In Santa Rosa he drove to a small, yellow and white stucco house and introduced me to Mrs. Dixie Duke, a 61-year-old Southern belle who years ago taught Mel Lyman all he knows about the fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

"He had red hair, I remember that," she said with an infectious Mississippi drawl. "He was a small, freckle-faced kid, full of the devil. I liked Mel. He wasn't an angel by any means, but he and I got along well.

"He was more original and creative than the others. He could draw cartoons and make up little skits, that sort of thing. Mel would make these little books you could flip through and make them move, you know? Cartoon things?"

Now retired, Dixie brought out a box of classroom photos she'd collected over 24 years. She started shuffling through them.

"I remember when he was in low six, he and Chester and Dennis made up a skit. I forget what it was about, but I'm sure it was clever. But part of it was about a race and they had to blow this

trumpet, you know? And Mrs. Wright, the principal—she had something wrong with her where, if she stayed still too long, she went to sleep. So she was sleeping during this skit, and the trumpet went off and scared her so much, oh my, we never did hear the end of that one."



"We had a program on today called *Wake Up*," deLong told the KPFK staff. "I took it off the air, to try to make the listening audience wake up. I grabbed David in the hall to try to make David wake up, to wake the whole staff up. Everybody here is aware, in one way or another, that this station is about to die."



"Mel never made particularly good grades," continued Dixie, " 'cause he wouldn't apply himself. The students got graded both for accomplishment and for effort, and I remember one time, Mel got an A for accomplishment, but for effort he got a low grade."

"I suppose if you can make an A without the effort, why make the effort?"

"Yeah, that was *his* attitude," said Dixie. "I agree with him now."

She reached for a copy of *Mirror at the End of the Road* that Mel, during a recent visit, had given her after carefully marking those passages he considered too pornographic for her to read. Protruding from the book was a Smokey the Bear bookmark.

"You know, George, I've been reading his book. And it depresses me, to read about all this mental turmoil he went through. I mean, he was such a happy li'l boy. I know he did have some trouble at home, his mother was divorced, I think, but he had this sister who was older and they seemed very close."

I asked Dixie if Mel seemed particularly spiritual as a child, and she dismissed the idea with a laugh.

"Oh," she said, "I'm not sure children know how to be spiritual."

"Not like he is now, anyway."

"I don't know," said Dixie, "*is* he interested in spiritual things?"

Suddenly it was apparent that Dixie Duke had not been fully informed of recent developments. I looked at George as he started to move uneasily in his chair.

"George," I asked, "haven't you told her about what's been going on?'

"Sure we've . . ."

"Is it something bad?" asked Dixie, worried.

"No," said George, "nothing like that."

"You see, Mrs. Duke, a lot of people think that Mel Lyman is God," I explained.

Dixie sat straight up. "They what?"

"They think Mel Lyman is God."

"George, is that true?" she asked, her voice rising.

"Well . . ." George was embarrassed, squirming quite a bit now. ". . . they think he's a very great man."

"Does *he* think he's God?" persisted Dixie.

"No, no," said George, but I wasn't about to let him get away with it.

"But George," I said, "in the Christ Issue, what did Mel mean when he said he was Jesus Christ?"

Dixie was shocked. "He said he was *Jesus Christ*?"

"That was just for the people who *needed* to believe that," said George with a weak smile. But Dixie wouldn't drop it.

"He thinks he's God? Well, I mean, he's a nice person but . . . he thinks he's *God*?" Dixie was partly laughing, partly scolding, her Southern drawl now loud and brittle, crowing like a cock.

"That's ridiculous! You tell him to come see me. *I'll* tell him he's not God. Tell Mel to come visit me, you hear? *I'll* tell him he's not Jesus Christ!"



In his career as a confirmed human being, J. C. Lyman has gone through numerous odd jobs, hundreds of towns, tanks of fermented spirits and two marriages, but now appears to be stabilizing a bit after 58 years.

George and I stopped off in San Rafael to see him, on our way back to San Francisco. Thoughtful, good-natured and handsome, J. C. presently works as some kind of civilian supervisor at nearby Hamilton Air Force Base.

During the Depression he traveled widely as a "music salesman," peddling courses in the violin and guitar "and I think we may have offered the accordion there for a while." He was servicing one of his Oregon routes in March, 1938, when he got word of the birth of his second child and first son. Two days later he made it to the hospital in Eureka, California.

"I'm afraid Mel was not very pretty when he was born," recalled J. C. "He had yellow jaundice or something, and he looked quite ugly. But his mother was very proud of him."

J. C. poured a beer and chuckled. "His mother . . . she's rather unusual. She's a good person, very hard-headed. She lives in Portland now and I understand she rides a motorcycle. She was a high school tumbler, that sort of thing, and she used to be able to pick me up and throw me across the room. I used to drink a lot and that would upset her, you know."

In 1941, J. C. was called into the Navy for several years and didn't see too much of Mel.

"He was an average child, I would say. He liked cats, I remember, he was crazy about kittens. And he liked music. He used to roll the drums at school when they brought up the flag. When he was a little older he used to sit around a lot—sort of a dreamer, I guess."

Actually, J. C. never has seen too much of Mel. He divorced Mel's mother in 1949, saw him occasionally in the summers, got a letter from him about once a year. In other words, they remained on good terms.

"Then a few years ago he sent me a copy of his book, *Autobiography of a World Savior.*" J. C. shook his well-tanned, gray-haired head. "I still don't know what to think about that book. That thing was a total surprise. I wrote him back, I said I didn't understand it. See, Mel's mother was a Danish Norwegian Lutheran and I

was raised a Catholic, but I never was what you'd call religious.

"Anyway, in the last few years he's been writing me fairly regularly. He used to tell me about all his wives. And he'd tell me how he was out to change the world. He'd say, 'The life we live is like a world within a world.'

"The other night he told me he has a terrific responsibility. They're gambling, financially, but they're very optimistic. They're hoping the new book will be a big success. He told me that right now Mark Frechette is their main financial source.

"Mel has a lot on his mind that he has to think about. I could see that he was very busy. He told me he wants to go to France and start a commune there."

George interrupted. "That's Dvora's trip," he explained. "Her family has two houses 15 minutes from the Riviera. And I think she had her mother sign 'em over to Mel just before she died."

Dvora, I remembered her—she was the rather disagreeable girl that badgered me in the Fort Hill office.

"He wants to keep expanding," continued J. C. "He figures the world's a mess and he wants to change it. I'm all for it, myself. I'm very proud of him."

"Do you think he'll succeed?" I asked.

"Wouldn't surprise me at all. Wouldn't surprise me at all. He's a lot smarter than I am. He's a leader, that's for sure."

"Do you believe he's God?"

Looking at his apartment ceiling, J. C. gave the question a moment's serious thought, then said, "I'm not convinced 100 percent that Mel Lyman is God. I'm not 100 percent convinced. But then, I'm not too religious. I'm not too sure about a lot of things."



Before reaching San Francisco, George and I stopped at some pizza shack for dinner. It had been a long day and I figured it was time to relax. But when I looked up from my beer, I noticed George was glaring at me, furious.

"You shouldn't have asked those questions to Dixie and J. C.," he said. "All your concepts about Mel and God."

"Why not? It's part of the story."

"Not to them, it isn't. They know Mel on a much simpler level; they didn't have to be bothered with questions like that."

"Bothered?"

"When I went back into the house, Dixie was crying, did you know that?"

Now I knew George was lying, or rather, acting. As we were leaving Dixie's house, George had gone back in to give her a photograph of her and Mel. She wasn't crying, she was laughing. I could hear it through the car window. Besides, she was a rugged atheist, not the kind of woman who would cry easily.

"Come on, George," I said, "That's not true. I can't believe that."

As if that remark was a cue, George started this weird number, breathing noisily in and out through his nose, like the dragons you see in cartoons. His wind tunnel eyes were blazing, it was incredible.

He kept it up for at least two minutes, staring at me all the while. I spent most of the time staring at the pizza, and, I guess, smiling.

"Well, what are we gonna do," I finally said, "stare at each other all night?"

With that George shot out his arm and—whack!—smacked me in the forehead with the back of his hand. Right there in the restaurant.

"You're on a cheap ride," he fumed, almost in tears. "And it's about to come to an end."



Intermission: Hello Boys A Visit from the Karma Squad

On the afternoon of August 12th, 1971, Jim Kweskin and two hefty associates, David Gude and Owen "O.D." deLong, paid a visit to our reporter in his San Francisco office. The ostensible reason for the meeting was to finish an interview begun earlier with Kweskin. But as it turned out, the three visitors did most of the questioning. They had heard rumors, they said. Some very strange people had been questioned—they mentioned Kay Boyle and Phil Sawyer—and they were worried about the reporter's attitude toward Mel Lyman. The following is an edited, taperecorded transcript of that encounter. It begins as Kweskin, Gude and deLong are seated in front of a desk occupied by the reporter.

Jim Kweskin (*he speaks slowly, soberly, a little nervous at first*): We've been misrepresented so many times, and obviously you have delved deeper than any other person from the outside. And that doesn't bother me. What bothers me is, one of the things that I'm concerned about, is how truthful, how honest you can be. I don't feel like you really feel anything from us yet. I think it's still all in your mind.

David Gude: In other words, from what feedback we're getting, we're getting a very opinionated feeling. That is, that you already have a feeling. That is, that you already have a feeling, that you're no longer open. You know, we've opened ourselves completely

to you, and now we're getting a very funny feeling back again, and it's weird and . . .

Kweskin: Now maybe the kind of questions that you're asking people are setting them up.

Reporter: My questions do not go in the story, the answers go in. And if this is to be a truthful story and an open story, it's your answers which will determine that, not how I go about getting it. I wouldn't be worrying too much about the questions I ask. I'd worry about the answers.

Gude: You're still not digging what I'm saying. What you write, contradictions, negative things, positive, doesn't matter. All we're really interested in now is you. (*Pauses dramatically.*) Now a lot's been given to you, a lot of information, a lot of trust. Our life is hard enough without giving to somebody things that can make our life more difficult. It's just a question now whether we want to go any further with you. At the moment we're feeling a little distrustful of you—not because of what you're going to write, it has nothing to do with that, strictly you as a person. I mean, you know where we all live, you know so much about us now.

Reporter: When we talked before, you said that if you haven't experienced Mel Lyman you're missing something. And I agree. I agree. And I don't think until I do meet him I'm going to know what you're talking about.

Kweskin: Well, that's not true. That *may* be true, but that *shouldn't* be true. Because what happened to you on the Vineyard, what happened to you on the hill—being with David Gude, being with George Peper—*that* is Mel Lyman. If David felt like you truly felt him, or George Peper or any of us felt like we had truly made some personal impression on you, *then* we would be open to having you meet Mel. But your personal life, your personal self, we have gotten none of that from you.

I mean, I truly don't feel like you want to be my friend. I feel like you want to ask me a bunch of questions, but you have no desire to be my friend whatsoever. I want to tell you something, man. You want to write an article about Fort Hill? You want

to know what that other thing is? What it is that you don't know about yet? What it is that will get you to Mel Lyman? That's what it is. *Human feeling.* And until you have some, until you express some, until you *are* that person, you're not going to find out any more.

Gude: Our goings on are no mystery. I mean, we're published in newspapers, we're doing everything we can to broadcast everything about ourselves, all the time. And you know, I personally can't even talk anymore about KPFK or anything. I mean, there's this kind of mistrust and this kind of feeling, these morality judgments that . . .

Reporter: I'm not making any morality judgments . . .

Gude: You are. You're making us stand on our heads to try and explain ourselves and I'm sick of it, because we're doing—all the time—everything we can for the sake of art and for the sake of promoting things and helping people.

Reporter: Nobody doubts your sincerity or high purpose. Nobody I've talked to. But it's simply that you have a habit of, as they say, laying your trip on somebody else.

Gude: That is a fucking lie, and you believe it just like all the rest. (*shouts*) It's a figment of your imagination, and you're pursuing it.

Reporter: I'm only pursuing your answer to that.

Gude: No you're not. You're pursuing it for yourself. Don't lay it all on the fact of trying to make it like some article you're writing. You're writing it for yourself. You are learning, you are seeking Mel Lyman in every way possible. (*speaks more slowly.*) And I'll tell you something else, the people who can understand us are working with us. There are a lot of people in the world who are just sick of dealing in the way that Maynard Solomon does, in the way that even Lisa is trying to make us deal with her. We don't live that way any more, we don't live by those rules. We simply produce from the heart. (*speaks bitterly, almost gagging.*) And to hell with all those ass-wiping motherfucking businessmen who do nothing but strangle you and just want the bucks, and

don't give a shit about God or love or art or anything. And you can put us down for not dealing on their level, but fuck them and fuck you too. If you don't understand it and you can't see it.

Reporter: One thing that puzzles me, David, is you're so defensive.

Gude (*shouts*)*:* I'm *not* defensive! I'm tired. We've been working well over 24 hours, and I've got a very, very tight schedule. And I see nothing but more of the same kind of misunderstanding and you with these same kind of questions. It's going nowhere, so I've got to put a stop to it.

Kweskin: The only people we lay any trip on are people who are *obviously* not even *trying* to do *anything* in this world, like the people at KPFK, who let their records run for five minutes on the end of a thing—shew, shew, shew—over and over again, who don't give a shit about their listeners, who don't give a shit about their station . . .

Gude: Who fucked up our tapes when we gave them to them in great trust. *That's* why we went down there.

Kweskin: And I'll tell you—anybody in this world, who believes in anything, who is strong and believes in what they're doing, is accused of laying their trip on somebody. It's true of every great politician that's ever existed, of every great religious leader that's ever existed. Mohammed laid his trip on everybody, laid his trip on ten billion people.

Reporter: Against their will?

Kweskin: Sure, yes. Read your Bible. Christ, man, laid his trip on people. He said, "Dig God, man. If you don't dig God, you might as well pack it up and forget about it."

Reporter: That's not really the same thing is it?

Kweskin: Yes, it's exactly what we do. Exactly what we do.

Gude: Absolutely. At KPFK that is the entire story, it's the story of the crucifixion. They *crucified* us down there.

deLong: Look at people like the great musicians of the past. I mean, you could ask that very same question to Bach. "Why

don't you produce something that the public could get into? Why are you producing these things that nobody likes? Don't you want to reach people?" You know what creation is? You can't help yourself. There's nothing you can do about it. God gives you the ability to create, and if you don't follow what he gives you, you die. No matter what your faults are, no matter what you think you should be doing, no matter what you think other people might want, no matter what you think other people might think of you, it doesn't matter. It comes from your guts, it comes from your heart, and comes from your soul. And it's called creation.

Reporter: But if Bach had done a little bit more than that, if he had, say, gone up and *forced* people to listen to it . . .

Gude: Hey, man, he was an Aries, and he damn well might have. If someone came along and fucked him over, he goddamn well might have slugged him right in the teeth. I mean, Hitler was a creator. Is this your whole problem? You never have been able to understand the whole concept of violence?

Reporter: I'm really not talking about violence so much as forcing people to accept against their will.

Gude: You're stretching it now. I mean, what does that have to do with creation, whether one person is forced to or not?

Reporter: It depends what your ultimate purpose is. Is it just to create, to entertain yourselves? Or is it to try to spread the word, to try to make people realize what Mel Lyman is like? If in the process of doing that, you turn them off by the methods you use, are you accomplishing that? That seems to be a logical question. Or is that not a concern of yours?

Gude: A lot of people are turned off, but they'd be turned off anyway. They were already turned off. We just gave them something to say they were turned off about.

Kweskin: We've won a lot of people.

Reporter: How many, do you know?

Kweskin: Millions, I'm not just talking about the people who live with us. I'm talking about the people who have felt something, and it has affected their lives, positively or favorably. Millions.

Reporter: How do you know?

Kweskin: I know. I know by the amount of people that come to see me in clubs, what they say about me and about Mel Lyman. Strangers from all over the country. I can tell by the things they say. I can tell by what they do from the audience. Right now the performances that I've been doing in the clubs have been higher than any church that anybody's been in. God has come into the room. Several times. And those people may have thought I was demanding, and maybe I *was* demanding, but it happened and there were a lot of people who felt it. And there are a *lot* of people who come up to me afterwards with nothing but love in their faces.

(*At this point David Gude stands up and starts slowly pacing about the room. Actually, he is swaggering, his body swaying back and forth, his heels hitting the floor hard as he casually examines the walls, the ceiling, the full-length window of the small, fourth-story room. Gradually he circles closer to the reporter.*

Reporter: What are you going to do next, do you know? After this album do you have any plans?

Gude (*with mock toughness*)*:* Yeah, we're going to tie you up in the chair and beat you till you understand. We might dangle you out the window by one leg. Perhaps knuckle you around the room a little bit. (*Everyone laughs.*)

Kweskin: Are you scared of us?

Reporter: No.

Kweskin: In any way whatsoever?

Reporter: No.

Kweskin: Why not?

Reporter: (*aside to Gude who now stands directly behind the Reporter, gloating down on him*)*:* I've heard some stories about you.

Gude: I have quick hands. (*More laughter.*)

Kweskin: Why not?

Reporter: I believe you respect the truth. Don't you?

Kweskin: I'm not sure you can tell the truth.

Gude: (*returns to his seat, in his own way gets serious*)*:* If you got something to be afraid about, then, you know, that's the reality

that perhaps will have to come to be. I don't know. I mean, as far as you go with us, that's what you'll get back. But it's really whatever you want, whatever you want, whatever you create. As a person.

Kweskin: The important part of this whole story, the personal part, the part that matters to me, the part that matters to all of us, you're never gonna get. 'Cause you're too impersonal.

Reporter: But don't you think with quotations from Mel's book and other writings and with what all of you have said, that that part, that *feeling,* will come through no matter what I do?

Kweskin: In other words, you are saying that the feeling of Mel Lyman is going to come through in spite of you.

Reporter: Exactly.

Kweskin: Well, we want the feeling to come through because of you.

deLong: Because of you.

Kweskin: That's what we want.

deLong: That should be a quote, by the way.

Reporter: So what you really want me to write is "What Mel Lyman Means to Me."

Kweskin: Or I should say, the *truth* will come through in spite of you. That's the quote. If you want to quote me, that's what you can say. The truth will come through in spite of you. I would *like* the truth to come through *because* of you.

Reporter: But you already have your mind made up that it can't.

Kweskin: Yes.

Reporter: Because of the questions I've been asking.

Kweskin: Because of the look in your eye. Because of the way you've been talking. Because of the feeling I get from you. Because of the questions you've been asking. I want you to have a heart, man, I really do.

(*During this, David Gude's expression has changed noticeably. His face is drawn tight against his cheek bones. His eyes are narrow, his mouth thin and bitterly straight. He appears almost delirious with rage. Now he stands, his fists clenched, and shouts.*)

Gude: There's a little bit more to life than just your fucking newspaper!

Reporter: I know that.

Gude: I don't think you *do.* I think you're a vicious con man, and a killer. You *kill* us. You kill the spirit—you and a million people like you.

Reporter: How are you going to change me? And a million people like me?

Gude: We've been trying for a long time now, haven't we! What's it gonna take?

(*Gude leans over the desk and, with a huge, violent sweep of his right hand, smashes the tape recorder, knocking it to the floor several feet away. Nonetheless, the sturdy little fucker keeps recording.*)

Reporter: Get out, all of you.

Gude: You feel anything?

Reporter: You *want* me to be afraid of you.

Kweskin: I want you to feel something, that's all. We've been sitting here for hours trying to make you feel *something,* something *good.* But you won't.

Gude (*continues screaming*)*:* You refuse to feel a goddamn thing. You refuse me as a person. You refuse him as a person. You hate his guts as a person. And we've been putting ourselves out and putting ourselves out. And *you're* making money from it.

Reporter: I'm not doing it for the money.

Gude: What *are* you doing it for?

Reporter: I think it's an important story, as I've said from the start.

Gude: What is important, man? (*hits desk with fist*) Am I important? I wish you would make me feel it. What do I gotta do to make you feel me—David Gude?

(*Reporter walks to the door, opens it.*)

Gude: That's what you feel from me—throw us the fuck out, right? I'm hurtin' inside and you're throwing me the fuck out. 'Cause you're scared.

Reporter: I'm not scared.

Kweskin: Then why you throwin' us out?

Reporter: This is not the way I work.

Kweskin: You want to know what Mel Lyman is? I'm going to tell you what Mel Lyman is. Mel Lyman is the person who made me want to *feel* people. He made me *feel* something. And now I can't live without it.

Gude: He made us *care.*

Kweskin (*now also starts to scream*): That's what life is all about. Feeling. And *I* don't *feel you.* And if you *do,* I want to see it. And if you don't know *how,* why don't you ask? *And I don't mean with words.*

deLong: What do you think God wants from you? If you express your feeling, it's not gonna jeopardize your story. We can go on from here and create a greater story.

Kweskin: You want to write an article about Mel Lyman? You're going to have to show us your feelings or you're not gonna get your story.

(*Exit Kweskin, Gude and deLong.*)



Part V
Invasion of KPFK
The Program of Richard Herbruck

Owen deLong is a normally quiet, powerfully built man with a distinguished goatee and academic record. In various capacities he attended Harvard from 1957 through 1968, graduating magna cum laude from the department of philosophy in 1961 and earning his Master's degree from the department of government in 1965. While working on his doctoral dissertation, "The Ideological Origins of Pragmatism in US Foreign Policy," Owen was given 15 assignments as a Harvard teaching fellow in history and government.

He was a consultant on Western Europe and East Asia for the Arthur D. Little "think tank," a fund raiser for the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton and a volunteer speech writer for Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy. Owen lists among his personal references Dr. Carl Kaysen of Princeton and Dr. Henry Kissinger.

So it must have been a bit humiliating when Melvin ordered him, as punishment for failing to commandeer Kay Boyle's San Francisco house in late 1970, to work as a waiter at one of the Frascati restaurants in West Hollywood. Oh well, it was a rich-mouth restaurant, and the fledgling Edinburgh Avenue community needed the money. Plus the job allowed Owen enough daytime off to look for better assignments. Particularly in the media.

First he sought out KCET, Channel 28, Los Angeles' educational television station.

"This was last November or December when Owen and George Peper visited the station," recalled Charles Allen, KCET program director. "They said they were working with a creative group of persons from Boston, and they had come out to see what kind of climate there was for the arts in L.A.

"Owen did 90 percent of the talking. He said Peper was an outstanding filmmaker, although Peper himself did not have much to say and I was unable to ascertain any specifics of his film background. At no time did either of them mention the names American Avatar or Mel Lyman."

On several occasions, said Allen, Owen returned to the station and talked at length on governmental and foreign policy. He even attended a party one night where he met most of the station's producers.

"He had a very outstanding resume, which was interesting to us because at that time we were getting into a great deal of news analysis. And Owen looked extremely brilliant on paper. He was articulate and seemed very, very bright."

Eventually, Allen said, Owen was not hired because funds for another news analyst's job did not come through. Also Owen had insisted that George be hired at the same time. "He was adamant that both work together, which was something we didn't take very seriously. I mean, normally when a filmmaker comes in looking for work, he has cans of film under his arm. But the silent Mr. Peper had nothing."

After that episode, Owen may have dropped out of sight for a while. We don't really know. In January of this year, United Illuminating Realty Trust bought the house on Sierra Bonita, and in April, "James Kweskin et al." purchased the Eastman mansion on Hollywood Boulevard. So perhaps deLong et al. were busy moving into those places.

But sometime in May Owen's resume finally worked and he was hired as program director for KPFK-FM, the liberal, politically

oriented Pacifica radio station in Los Angeles.

"Then, I guess it was in late May or early June," Allen remembered, "I got a call from Marvin Segelman, the station manager at KPFK. Marvin said, 'Did you ever speak to a fellow named Owen deLong?' I said yes. And he said, 'Well, a peculiar thing has happened here . . .'"

So peculiar, in fact, that for two months afterward everyone at KPFK refused to talk about it. They were even reluctant to file police reports until, a week or two later, the FBI insisted on it. Finally, after receiving a promise of anonymity and a short lecture on the power of a free press, one witness, a man who had worked at KPFK for some time, agreed to discuss the matter, over the phone, long distance.

"Owen's a difficult person to describe," he began. "Superficially, he was very quiet. And he spoke very softly, and he moved very slowly, the sort of person one might describe in other circumstances as bookish, intellectual—withdrawn, perhaps. Certainly not outgoing or boisterous.

"One thing that clearly sticks in my mind was the first meeting that he had as Program Director with the programming portion of the staff here. He came in and he said, you know, 'I'm sure you all would like to know who I am and what I have in mind,' and started to give us a little speech about what his philosophy was for programming, which was extremely strange. I had no idea what he was talking about.

"I remember one thing. The National Lawyers Guild planned to hold here in Los Angeles a symposium similar to the Detroit Winter Soldier thing, and we wanted to broadcast it live. That sort of thing is exactly the stuff we put on because nobody else will put it on. And Owen was very negative about it. 'I'm not even sure that here at the station we want to have something which is what you've been calling public affairs.' And he got very mystical and said, 'People here in Los Angeles are searching for something. I don't know whether there's an answer, but I think we should try to find it and give it to them.'

"Everybody was slightly confused, but people here are pretty tolerant and we thought, OK, we'll give him a chance. But then things just got weirder and weirder. Something was wrong. Nobody could put their finger on it at the time, but everybody felt it."

"There was a growing uneasiness about him?"

"Oh yes, definitely. Let me tell you the specific thing which coalesced the staff's opinion and culminated in the assault. Every so often at the station we have open time, time scheduled on the air where for any variety of reasons no program is available. And it turns out that during this month there was an hour, I think once a week in the afternoon, that was free like this. And Owen said he had something he wanted to put in there. He said, 'I have these friends of mine who have produced a very fine and interesting music program, sort of a history of rhythm and blues.' "

"At this time had he said anything about American Avatar or Mel Lyman?"

"No, no. It had been known—I don't know how this came out—that Owen in fact had belonged to a commune back East. But for all we knew it was just a bunch of people who got together and cooked meals in a big pot.

"OK, so he brings in a tape, and after it was broadcast he complained that it wasn't broadcast at a loud enough level. And the person in charge of those details, the Production Director, said, 'OK, well, when you bring the next one in, I'll check it to make sure the board operator didn't foul up.' "

When Owen brought in the next week's tape, said the witness, he carefully pointed out that it was preceded by a test tone, a standard procedure for setting levels.

"The Production Director took the tape down personally, set it up on the tape machine, checked the test tone level, made sure it was absolutely perfect and ran the tape. Well, Owen came down while the tape was on and again started complaining that it wasn't loud enough. He wanted to turn the broadcast volume up. The board operator pointed out that if one turned the broadcast volume up, one risked the danger of overmodulating the signal and causing

distortion and increasing the background hiss of the tape to an objectionable level."

According to the KPFK engineers, the tape itself was at fault. "The Production Director had inspected the earlier tape and said he thought the basic problem was that the program material wasn't recorded loud enough on the tape. And you can't compensate for that. There's absolutely no question about this. Several people checked this, it was definitely below the norm. It was definitely below the quality of the stuff that we produce and broadcast regularly here.

"OK." Here the witness took a deep breath. "On the third program, a week later, about two minutes before it was over, Owen goes down to the broadcast studio, goes in, orders the person on duty at the master console to phase the program down and to give him a live microphone. Now this is strictly against every rule of operation here and probably even violates some FCC rules, I don't know. One does not interrupt programs for any reason unless it's some really dire emergency. Also, he did not identify himself. The point is, it was highly irregular.

"And Owen went on the air—the poor engineer is just sitting there with his mouth hanging open—and he said, 'This program is being taken off the air because it's not being presented properly, in the proper technical fashion.' And some other statement to the effect that it's a shame programs which are produced as well, artistically and technically, as this program can't be aired properly. And furthermore, if listeners have any concern about this radio station, they should call and write and complain about this.

"No sooner had he said this, I mean the words had hardly quit resonating through the room, than our telephone switchboard began to light up—ten or 12 calls. Which is automatically suspicious, because we've had any number of weird things go out over the air, real emergencies, disaster, what have you, and there is always a five-to-ten-minute lag before phone calls start coming in. And these calls came in *instantly.*"

After several almost identical calls in, David Cloud, the station's

associate musical director, told the switchboard he'd take the next one.

"David must have talked to this person at least seven or eight minutes, and he was just saying the same old thing, getting more and more berating. So finally David said, 'I hope you don't mind me asking, and you certainly don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but did someone ask you to call?' And the person said, 'No, I did it spontaneously.' And David said, 'OK, well, I appreciate your being honest,' and the guy finally hung up.

"So then David put the phone down and turned around . . . and Owen deLong was standing there. He'd been standing there for 30 seconds or so, and apparently heard the last part of the conversation. He had an absolutely ferocious look on his face and shouted at David, 'Come here. I want to talk to you!' He was quite clearly angry, and David was quite clearly frightened. And David said, 'I don't want to talk to you right now. I'll talk to you later.'

"At that point Owen rushed over, grabbed David's shirt and his arm, his left arm, grabbed him and pushed him a good ten to 12 feet against the sharp outer corner of this wall. There was an L-shaped metal brace on the corner, and it hit him right in the back, about an inch away from his spine. Owen grabbed his arm with such force that the imprint of four of his fingers was clearly visible for about a week; it had broken capillaries under the skin. And David had this huge bruise, six or seven inches long, up his rear end to where his kidneys were. He couldn't sit down for at least a day. He was almost picked up off his feet; he's very slight, about 6'3", 140 pounds. And Owen's about a six-footer, 190 pounds.

"So then David broke away from him, ran down the hall, and Owen was chasing him, shouting and screaming. And he had this absolutely maniacal look on his face. I have never seen a look like that on the face of any human being before. An absolute and total contrast to any state I had seen Owen in before, a complete Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde transformation. David was terror-stricken,

he was afraid for his life. He ran toward the back part of the building where some other staff members, who had been alerted by the switchboard operator, ushered him into the lounge part of the women's restroom. And everybody's asking, you know, 'What happened, what happened?'

"And then Owen comes to the door of the lounge, opens the door, comes in, closes the door behind him, puts his back to the door, holding the door closed, blocking it, saying:

" 'I want to talk to you! David, you *have* to talk to me! David, YOU ARE IN MY POWER!" That's an exact quote. 'DAVID, YOU WORK FOR ME! I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR YOU!'

"And all David said was, 'Owen, I don't want to talk to you. Please go away and leave me alone.' Several people pushed Owen out of the way, and David ran outside the building, onto the sidewalk, where he was finally able to regain his senses."

Actually, what he did was run up to two KPFK production people, more or less for protection. They were standing in front of the building, a few feet from Cahuenga Boulevard West, and David starting chatting with them, as casually as he could, gradually catching his breath. A few moments later the door opened and out walked Owen deLong. Slowly he approached the three.

"He was completely different," said the witness. "He was very calm, not aggressive or violent, and he had this absolutely dazed look on his face—you know, staring straight ahead, looking at somebody but not seeing them, that sort of thing. He looked as if he were really spaced out on acid. He didn't even acknowledge David's presence."

When Owen started speaking, the words were almost inaudible, blending with the low, rhythmic rush of cars from the nearby Hollywood Freeway.

"He kept mumbling and saying things to himself. Things like, 'The fellow who produced this program will never produce another program for us again. It was such a good program. Too bad the program won't be on. The fellow who produced this program will never. . . .' "



In the meantime someone had phoned station manager Marvin Segelman, who was at lunch. He returned, took Owen out for coffee, talked with him for a bit and fired him. "Owen said he was only trying to wake David up," recalled Segelman. "I said that's fine, but no touching, no hitting, you know?" He also fired Joey the Janitor, a member of the Lyman Family who had been hired by Owen and who had built, at the Family's suggestion and expense, a fine set of shelves in the record library. KPFK agreed to pay for the shelves, said Segelman, but no bill had been presented.

That night a meeting of the KPFK board and staff, about 40 people, was scheduled in the station's auditorium upstairs. Owen asked Segelman if he could attend and give his side of things, and Segelman, a fair-minded liberal to the end, said OK. The following is from an edited tape recording of that meeting, also attended by Mark Frechette:

Marvin Segelman: One of the issues involved in recent days which I think has manifested itself as something which must be dealt with by us is the question of Owen, and his position as program director. Owen has asked to express himself and his ideas to us, and I think that possibly the best opening for this meeting is at this point to listen to Owen and to react to him and then have an opportunity to relate to each other as best we can.

(*As Owen speaks, he struts dramatically about the room, punctuating his remarks with loud boot stomps, long silences and cold stares inches from the faces of individual staff members. No one interrupts.*)

deLong: We had a program on today called "Wake Up." (*Stomp, stomp, stomp.*) I took it off the air, to try to make the listening audience wake up. (*Stomp, stomp, stomp.*) I grabbed David in the hall to try to make David wake up, to wake the whole staff up. (*Stomp, stomp, stomp.*) Everybody here is aware, in one way or another, that this station is about to die. Somehow each of you ultimately resists the spirit. (*Stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp.*) You didn't even want to talk to me, after what I had done to David. You

wanted me to leave the building. I was dangerous. Something might change. (*Stomp, stomp.*) Well, I'm leaving. And I don't know whether anything will change or not. And I think the only thing I've been able to do, and it's all that I had hoped to do, is to provide the opportunity for all of you to change. (*Stomp, stomp, stomp.*) If you can. (*Stomp, stomp, stomp.*) But that's the only thing that will save this station. And I don't know whether the spirit will ever come again or not. And I don't know if you'll recognize it when it comes.

A defiant woman: Who said the station's about to die? I don't think anybody here feels that. I don't think anybody here feels the station is about to die.

Frechette: That's what wrong. There isn't one person here, besides Owen, who feels that.

A low-voiced, slightly pompous man: That's quite a presumption, for anyone to make.

Frechette: It's also the truth.

Pompous man, scornfully: The spirit? Station dying? Come off it.

(*deLong and Frechette stomp out of the auditorium. There is a pause, then the entire staff breaks out in laughter and cynical giggling.*)

A frightened woman: Marvin, could I interrupt for a second? I have a terrible . . . I'm afraid. Could I just say something? I have an awful premonition . . . a maybe foolish fear . . . of an explosion or a bomb or something.

Pompous man: I don't think so. What we have heard, it seems to me, is something that I've heard many times before. But I don't think . . . that we have any cause for fear. At all. If I were to deliver myself of any opinion in terms of what we have just heard, I would spell it P . . . I . . . T . . . Y. It's terribly unfortunate, but I don't think that any of us ought to react in any spirit of any kind of fear at all. If anything, that man needs compassion, it seems to me, of every person in this room, irrespective of what we may think, either in a personal way or as a result of actions

that took place here in this building this afternoon. It's quite obvious, at least to me, that that man needs help. And I think if any of us here are in a position to give it to him, we ought to try and do so.



"It was so fine and efficient," said George Peper, shoving a recent forkful of pancakes into his beaming mouth. "Jessie and I were living out in L.A. at the time, and we were just talking about KPFK that morning. And we got a call from Mel in New York."

George wiped some syrup from his chin. "Mel called, and we were *mobilized* in half an hour. Three cars full in half an hour!"

Three cars full, ten people speeding east on Sunset Blvd. in the afternoon sun. Mark Frechette, George, Owen, David Gude, the whole crew. Mark sitting in the back, adjusting his grip on the crowbar, slapping it into his other hand, thinking about what Owen said the night before, "station's about to die, station's about to die."

At Highland the cars turned left, heading north past the Hollywood Bowl to the northbound lanes of the Hollywood Freeway, then off at Lankershim, left on the overpass to Cahuenga Blvd. West, up a service alley to the rear of a modern, two-story, brick and concrete building, KPFK.

"We were all sitting around in the hallway, drinking coffee," Marvin Segelman said later. "You know, there's kind of a reception area there and we were just sitting around. And they came in the front door. They were armed with hammers and screwdrivers and crowbars.

"They announced they were gonna take back their shelves. And, well, I told 'em they could do that. We were going to pay for them, they were beautiful shelves. But I said they could have them back. I wasn't about to stop them.

"They stationed people at the front and back. Half of them went to the music library and started ripping out the shelves, and the other half went to the doors. I just told everyone to keep working

and not say anything.

"But then our chief engineer went to leave, and they wouldn't let him. They sort of shoved him back, not hard, they just wouldn't let him leave."

Apparently that was the door manned by Mark Frechette. "I was just the back door man, that's all," Mark recalled, chuckling. "I just played the big Nazi part, you know. There's plenty of room to play the Nazi part around here. The guy wanted to go through, and I just told him to go ask someone else. 'My orders are no one goes through.'

"I was mad. And the thing that got me mad was there was nothing to get mad at. They all just kept working. We thought there was gonna be resistance, you know? I mean, when there's no opposition, there's no change."

David Cloud was quietly working in the music library when four men he'd never seen before suddenly stormed in and started demolishing the new shelves with crowbars. "Hey, what do you guys think you're doing?" he shouted. A female employee grabbed David and led him from the room, cupping her hand over his mouth. "I'll explain it to you later," she said. Segelman told him to "go to my office and lock yourself in."

Meanwhile, said Segelman, some of the Lyman people were going up to employees at their desks, particularly secretaries, and verbally intimidating them, yelling at them to "wake up," or silently staring at them bug-eyed.

"Finally, one guy who works for us on our Folio, a big guy, simply bolted out the front door and called the cops."

KPFK Operations Director Paul Fagan also was in the reception area when the Lyman forces marched in. "It appeared to be a fairly well-executed paramilitary operation," he said later. "No instructions were given. Each person seemed to know exactly where he was supposed to go.

"The effect was to terrorize the entire station, just by their numbers and strangeness. They stared, they followed people; they stared, you know, with that kind of vacant stare of controlled rage."

Fagan's first reaction was to protect the master control room, the station's nerve center, and he rushed to the rear of the first floor where it was located. Just in time; David Gude had already taken his position inside.

"I told him to leave," said Fagan. "He wouldn't, so I grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him out. He just stood there with this look of glee on his face, because, I guess, I was forced to touch him."

The control room door was then locked, and Fagan started patrolling the halls looking for trouble. "I mean, they walked in with hammers and crowbars. There was no way to tell what they intended to do. If any of us had lost control and started slugging, it would have been a Donnybrook."

At one point Fagan tried to escape through the front door, but Owen grabbed him from behind and demanded, "What's going on, Paul?" Fagan jerked free and said something sarcastic about oh nothing, just a bunch of guys roaming around with crowbars.

Owen stared at him fiercely and repeated, "No really, what's going on?"

Then, said Fagan, Owen lunged forward as if he was going to strike him. Paul recoiled, pointing his finger and shouting angrily, "Don't do that again!"

Owen smiled and acknowledged Fagan's hand. "What's that?" he asked, teasing.

"Uh . . . it's my finger."

"No it's not, it's a gun. Would you kill me?"

Fagan stuttered. "I, uh . . . I don't know, I . . ."

"Well, I would kill *you*."

Fagan pushed deLong aside and continued his patrol. "I walked into the music room where a group of them were taking down the shelves. It was really bizarre, like some strange kind of church service. They all stopped what they were doing and began this strange litany."

The litany, recalled Paul, consisted mainly of single words chanted in ominous tones.

"Afraid," said one.

"Not real," said another.

"Coward."

"Dead."

According to Fagan, "When I asked one of them, 'What do you mean?' another would answer, 'No spirit,' something like that. Then one guy pointed at my hair and said, 'I hear the hair continues to grow after the body's dead.'

" 'Are you going to kill me?' I asked, and one of them said, 'We would if we wanted to, but you're dead already.'

"Finally, after they finished dismantling the shelves, one of them—I guess it was David Gude—came up with his crowbar and began slowly moving it around my head and my body.

" 'You and David Cloud better watch out,' he told me. I said, 'For what?' and he said, 'You'll find out soon enough.' "

This sort of thing, Fagan recalled, was going on all over the building. "It was eerie: individually they weren't much, but you could really feel the power of the group as a whole.

"I don't know if 'terrorizing' is the right word, exactly. What they were doing was, they were *mindfucking* us, you know?"

As the police arrived the last of the shelves were being removed and carried outside to the three cars in the alley.

The police checked the IDs of the invaders and took down their names. But when KPFK refused to file an official complaint, they made no arrests, simply waited until the shelves were removed and the building cleared. Later, agents from the FBI advised Segelman to file a report, "just to get it on the record."

"I remember one person shouted, 'This place is dead, we might as well go ahead and blow up the building,' " said our earlier witness. "That was the thing that made us feel there perhaps was some danger to the staff members."

As a precaution, Segelman hired a private guard to protect KPFK for a week.

Somewhere in all this was a lesson, and Mel Lyman figured it should be taught to more people than just the staff at KPFK.

A few days later he wrote a little sermon and asked the editors of the Los Angeles Free Press to print it. For some reason they consented, without even a proof read. Headlined THE WORLD IS DYING, the item attacked "all those empty faggots and KPFK," and concluded with these words:

"You know what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna get up an army of all the people in this world who still have enough balls to fight this creeping decay and we're gonna go around raiding all you creeps, and there ain't nothing you can do about it, just sit on your beards and wait for us to come. It will probably take me a long time but there's nothing else to do. I don't give a damn about my life anymore because I'm a living, feeling, dedicated human being all alone on a big dead planet. I don't want to do God's Will. God is angry at you, I know, he tells me so. You killed Him. You stuck a joint in his mouth and put him out to pasture, you palmed him off on your friends as "peace and love." You made a mockery of His Great Strength. You crucified Him in **HIS NAME**! But he'll get you, he ain't that easy to lay aside, he's inside you right now and mad as hell. You forgot about His Wrath. He'll make a Big Earthquake and swallow you all up, ideas and all. And He's inside ME! He makes my heart pound He's so big inside me. He's coming back, and not like you thought he would, he's coming back **Mad. He is the great destroyer.**

"War and Hate,
"Richard Herbruck"



Part VI

Hosanna, Hosanna

Mere mention of the American Avatar community at community supported KPFK-FM radio station in Los Angeles causes shudders, talk of 'fearing for one's life,' and bewilderment. When I was to meet Avatar family members at the Troubadour to talk about their 'raid' on KPFK and then to visit their home, I was advised to cancel the meetings or take along a bodyguard. Yet after several contacts with Mel Lyman's friends in Los Angeles (I didn't cancel and I did go alone!) I found them cheerful, creative and very together people who I really liked."

—Editor Art Kunkin, "Is Mel Lyman God?" Los Angeles Free Press, July 30, 1971

Dear Mel,

Glad to see someone defend the practice of insulting people for the sake of waking them up. Been my method all the time. But it would be advised: No, no—you'll only turn people off by trying to tell them what's wrong with them. Almost started feeling guilty.

Your judgments are *usually* correct. They usually match mine, that is. This is one of the correct ones.

Pull their hats down over their eyes, Mel. Spin them in circles, so they land with a rude bump on the tip of the spine. Enough bumps, and they smile, scratch their head, and say "Oh! . . . Yeah!"

It's a good paper. Thank you. Did you think you had any Avatar-reading med students?

Paul Viola

"My feelings are very mixed about him. In one way he's like colossally evil and dangerous, and in another way he's like, you know, just the fact that he *can* gather all these people around him and make them believe in him so much means that there's something in him that's—*unusual,* for lack of a better word."

—Paula Press

"Spiritual hunger is a familiar enough theme these days. It is clearly in evidence here. It is too often forgotten, however, that there is also a very human and a very powerful desire to satisfy that hunger. It is Paul Tillich, in fact, who claims for man a certain primitive courage that almost compels him to make sense of a mad world and see purpose and meaning in his own life.

"Mel appeals to that courage. He arouses it. And because of this, it is more than likely that his cult will grow. To a spiritually starved generation he offers an explanation. He sees the meaning in life. He's sure he's right. He has all the dogmas, all the answers. He's the *Avatar.* Hell, he's God. And he's a groovy God. He talks hip. You can understand him."

—Anthony R. Dolan, "Do You Know the Courage Man?" National Review, Dec. 3, 1968

"I fail him every day. I fail him all the time. And he puts up with me. As long as I can be of service to him, I can stay near him. And it is these things that are the most important thing in my life. I've given up, you know, making a name for myself, or making money, or my family. All those things I have put aside. Any personal gratification that I get from something, well, that's great, you know? But what does it have to do with mankind? What does it have to do with this planet, and with the world? And those are the things that he is concerned with. And they're obviously the most important things."

—David Gude

"In a funny way, though children are my life, I don't live for them. In other words, if you as a person have a greater purpose, you can't help but give your children a greater purpose. In my life here, at any moment I may be called away from my children. I was sent away from them this time last year. I had to leave 'em and go all by myself down to New York, and it was awful. But that was still more important to me, doing whatever Melvin tells me is still more important to me, you know, than even the children."

—Faith Franckenstein

"When I'm in the same room with Mel, I feel like a big dummy. I feel my own stupidity and my own heaviness, my own prides and my own ego and all the things that, you know, somehow I trick myself into believing aren't there. When he's around you just see it all, you just see yourself so freely. You can't help it.

"When he's angry, there's nobody that's ever angrier. When he's happy, there's nobody that's ever happier. When he's sad, there's nobody that's ever sadder. When he's funny, there's nobody that's ever funnier.

"I think if I hadn't met Mel Lyman I would be dead."

—Jim Kweskin

What a waste it would have been, thinking how I came all this way and did not talk to Mel. But I sit here and I'm glad. Why am I glad? I am afraid to talk to him. I am timid to go in and say, "Hello, I'm Mike and I came to talk to you," with big exuberant exclamation points.

But I sit here all nervous and glad to retreat unnoticed to a corner.

There is greatness in the next room . . . too much for me to touch without getting burned bad, burned good. I never in my life met anybody who I did not feel as if I could crush, who I was better than . . . didn't need to listen to.

I can't touch Mel . . . I just listen to low talking in the next room.

This is so good. People rap about how Mel is on an ego-trip, blowing himself up with self-importance. He *is* important, but it's not for him that you say it. You say it for yourself . . . he doesn't need it.

He knows. We all need Mel.

—from a letter in Avatar

Mel,

I know you from some other time. Remember? I'm the little sensitive guy that used to listen to you when you spoke to the crowds by the river. You looked at me once, and you knew. It's great to see you again. I'm living now Mel. I picked up an Avatar in Boston and saw your name. I knew. I would break an arm to sit and talk through the night with you Mel. I think you have The Key and I will need it to unlock the door. . . . how do I find you? I'm not familiar with the Boston area, but I'll find you somehow. That will be fun too. Someday soon I'll walk in and say, "Hi Mel" and you will know. Wow, we have some great things to talk about.

Hitch-hiking-feeler-bum-thinker-doer-that is me

Wayne Hansen to Harry Duncan, editor, the Blue Bus:

"Dear Harry,

"We were all pleased to see that you have been using Mel's stuff in The Blue Bus but I'd like to caution you. Mel is a totally conscious person, and when he writes, he is a totally conscious writer. That makes it absolutely impossible to edit his stuff or to leave any typos in it . . . Mel's stuff can be used as an example and a standard for perfection. Recently many people have commented to me about how clean the paper is, how carefully we must work to keep it looking so good. Well, that result comes from constantly striving to keep Ol' Mel happy."

"By any standards whatsoever, Mel Lyman is the best writer alive on this planet today. That is such a small thing in the face of what Mel is that it almost makes me laugh to say it, it's like saying Mel knows more about contemporary football than anyone else around (also true), but I say it because I know it will surprise a lot of you when you finally realize I mean what I say in that first sentence, I feel it from the bottom of my heart and every inch of the way up, and that's the purpose of this essay, to let you know what Mel's writing is to me and to help you realize that Mel's words contain more of the magic ingredients that fill emptiness than any other product on the shelves. When you reach for printed matter, reach for Melvin."

—Paul Williams, essay on Mel Lyman prepared for Crawdaddy

"His voice, nasal and off-key, is most readily compared to Woody Guthrie's, but where Guthrie sings extroverted 'hey-hey-hey's' between verses, Lyman moans, often throughout entire songs. Lyman knows that his voice is awful, but for his kind of performance, it makes no difference. His gentleness, honesty, and warmth pervade the Orleans; the audience becomes noticeably kinder by the end of the evening than it was at the beginning."

—Linda Kalver, "Lyman Happens at Orleans," Boston After Dark, May 11, 1966

Dear Mel,

I called Boston today and talked to Maria at Avatar and she gave me your address. I always feel so close to you in my mind and heart it jolts me when I realize that years have passed since we have seen each other.

That day I came home from the mental hospital. Walking into your house and seeing you there with tears in your eyes. No one has ever cried *for* me, Mel. No one but you. And then kneeling in front of you and you took my hands and held them and the shadows that were in front of our eyes came down for that moment and we looked at each other and really, really saw, and there is just nothing else to say. You are in my heart, you have and always will be. You know I love you, for I do, and you, therefore, know it. It doesn't even require you being near. It is just there, lying soft and quiet and warm, a little thing deep inside, like a glow. I don't even get curious about it. I just accept it. How nice and how comforting that it has always been there.

I love you Mel, and if love keeps one safe, your protection is immense.

My love and happiness to you,
Janie O'Dell

Dear Mel,

I can't seem to not write this letter to you. I have tried, but I keep ending up here in front of the typewriter. I even tried writing this letter to someone else—it must be because I read the book all the way through the completed version last night for the very first time.

For me to approach the book to read it is already an awesome responsibility. I stand in awe of its greatness and purity—I can't believe it. It's full of miracles and its greatest miracle is its reality. It really is the new bible, born to be read and read again, inexhaustible in its capacity to teach. Sometimes I come to a passage I've read before and I say 'oh no, I can't read that one again, I couldn't stand it,' but I read it and it's not what I remembered at all, it's something new each time.

I want to take *Mirror at the End of the Road* and wave it in front of every face in America and shout "Read *this*!" I can't wait until it's printed so I can go and do just that. Nowhere, ever, has such an opportunity as this book been made available to people. I want to make sure they don't miss it. They can't afford to lose out, and I can't afford to let them.

I want to go on and on, but this book is of the Spirit, and it beggars praise or criticism or personal opinion. In the past Christian martyrs died for the Spirit and Christian crusaders killed for it, but you make the greatest sacrifice of all, you LIVE for it.

Love, Wayne

—Preface, Mirror at the End of the Road

Dear Mel,

I had never heard of Avatar till a friend gave me no. 9. Now I shall never be without it. I was a strange blend of straight and hippie, and I was lonely. I didn't really fit in with either. But now I am not alone anymore, for you have reached out and touched me.

Thank you so much,
Lizz

Dear O'pa,

When I came to Boston—to the hill, I saw you as my goal—as my Christ—and I wanted to crawl into your body and see the world through your eyes and mind and body. But I couldn't so I settled for listening to your every word and becoming one of your faithful followers. Yet I feel that I've lost a part of you—I know that I will gain so much more. I cannot continue any longer—my mind is blank and my emotions are taking over. So I end this letter half finished—only to say that I hope you understand that this is all one foolish child can say to her Christ.

Love,
Eva (the little Virgo-Aquarius)

Dear Mel,

I just finished reading a book called *Siddhartha*, and while I was reading it I had a weird, familiar feeling—I knew Siddhartha. You are Siddhartha. How much you must know—how much you must have lived—how hard it must have been.

Love from your little sister and
disciple, Aurora

Dear Mel,

I never got the last issue of Avatar, but I just bought No. 22. It's 3:00 A.M. and I just found out that you're leaving. I'm so shook, I can't sleep now and I'm scared of the dark anyway.

Mel, I love you! I need you so bad! In 3 days I'll be seventeen (yes, only a mere child). Maybe I don't matter to you, but I've always felt that you loved us all, no matter what. I may not have made it this far if not for you. I've learned too much too fast and am terrified by it. Twice I tried to cop out and both times I made it back in time. I won't go into detail because it's not important now. Anyway you have been my greatest help in times when I can't trust myself. I may even become a stable person after all, but for now I'm afraid again. Oh Mel, you are the best thing in my grey little life. Everything is so dull. But I love

the sunshine and I love you! Oh, baby, please don't go! Help me! I need you! I'm begging! I'm crying!

I've been telling myself I'll go to Boston in the summer and see you. But I'm broke and Mom will worry etc. I will leave right now if I can catch you and worry about other things later.

Do you know what I was going to do when I got to Boston? I was going to scream with joy and run all the way to 37 Rutland St. and when I found you I was going to kiss your feet. I adore you.

Can I still come? Where are you going? Will you answer me please? I'll do as you say whatever you say.

Oh Mel, I'm so afraid! I'm afraid of the dark and of being alone now. I'm crying in big sobs now and can't write much more! Please don't leave me! I love you! Please, please, don't leave me all alone!!

Love,
Kathy (Aries)

"God I love him; how the hell will I weasel out of *this* one?"
—Paul Williams, essay on Mel Lyman

Mel,

I LOVE you, Mel, I love you all. Christ, am I going QUEER, loving people with names like Mel and Wayne and Brian and Skip? And Eben? But no, I still play with myself occasionally; I still give chicks the eye; no, maybe I'm bisexual. No, dammit. Maybe—just maybe—I'm finally shedding all my hangups and finally beginning to LOVE.

Keep it coming. No, on second thought, take it easy—I don't know if I can take it. NO. On third thought, KEEP IT COMING—and I'll write you again when I become anti-matter.

Rhino

Max Lefcourts on Madison Avenue has always wondrous shoes. One pair indeed was shaped somewhere in Italy especially for Mr. Lyman. It took the passionate Latin soul to shoe Christ. . . . Once shod, Mel became a perfectly perfect Twinkle-Toes and danced straight out of the shop with Owen deLong and over to the CBS building where I awaited. He said, "Owen bought me some shoes. How do I look?" "Like Mel Lyman," I said. Which was true and which made him happy.

—Brian

(*Under a picture of Mel's shoes in the Avatar, Third Cycle—Second Issue*)

Mel,

I never believed in God before I heard of you, but I do now; you are my God. Thank you for being. Even though it probably makes you sick, I love you.

King Fag

Dear Mel,

You are so great I can hardly stand it, I would rather read your words than anything that has ever been written, the world has been waiting for a man like you to come along for a long time now, thank God you're finally here.

Love Mel



Part VII
Melvin at the End of the Road

The jet descended into one of those rare Los Angeles nights when late autumn breezes turn the city into a basin of warm coals. George sat by the window, staring first at the million lights below, then the stars. He seemed at peace with the ride. "Taurus moon," he finally announced as the runway beacons came into view. "It's always smooth like this when there's a full moon in Taurus."

Wayne Hansen was there to meet us and took us immediately to a gold Mercury limousine idling outside the terminal. As we approached, the driver's side of the car suddenly exploded and out popped a handsome young chauffeur wearing a black tuxedo, black cap and tiny black glasses. He spoke not a word but went straight to his work, in four staccato movements grabbed George's bag, dumped it in the trunk, slammed the passenger doors shut and sped off toward the Hollywood Hills.

Despite his swiftness and dark glasses, he was at once recognizable from his many photographs. There was no mistaking the gaunt cheek bones and well-trimmed, boyish hair, and I felt a strange calm knowing I was in the hands of the Great Prankster. It all seemed so symbolically right. "Next time go to hell, and leave the driving to Mel." There were no introductions except for George leaning over in the front seat and whispering, "Hello, brother." Yet I was sure of his identity. For one thing I had seen that black

cap before in snapshots from the *Mirror* book. And then, as we raced up La Cienega at 4 AM, Wayne asked him some mock chauffeur questions and called him "Richards." Of course—the Richard Herbruck thing.

How long would they play this game? I wondered as we all piled out at the Eastman Mansion. I stared at the chauffeur for a sign, a grin perhaps, but he simply whipped around with George's bag and hurried into the servant's entrance. I smiled knowingly at George, but he acknowledged nothing, just told us to take off our shoes and led us through a side door to the living room.

As George had explained earlier, the Los Angeles Community was operating on a night schedule, which meant that dinner would be served in an hour or so. Thus the atmosphere seemed one of formal relaxation after a hard night's day. Fires were burning in many of the rooms, and one by one members of the family, their faces scrubbed and clothes neatly ironed, wandered in and sat around the main fireplace. For the most part these were the vets, Melvin's oldest and closest disciples. Jessie was there, David Gude, Eddie, Melinda. Jim Kweskin would have been there had he not been touring. Each person said hello, sat down and stared silently, usually straight ahead. There was no small talk. Also no big talk, no reading, no fidgeting, no music, no TV, no joking and no touching. The silences were unnerving; someone should poke up the fire, I thought, then maybe turn around and jab a few times at these smouldering zombies.

At one point George mentioned the smooth plane ride attributable to the peculiar aerodynamic qualities of a full Taurus moon. "It was full two days ago," sneered Melinda, concluding the discussion.

I kept looking for the chauffeur. What was he doing, changing clothes in some backroom phone booth for yet another theatrical prank? After about 20 minutes a woman walked in whom I had not yet met, a strangely beautiful and slender woman in a long white fairy dress. She was introduced as Eve Chayse, Gail's sister, and appeared friendly, high spirited and extremely pale, as if she

had just given blood for a noble cause.

"Would you like to meet Mel?" she asked, and I realized that the moment to impress these dullards with my insight was at hand. "I think I already have," I announced; but the murmur that followed resembled confusion more than adulation, and I had to quickly recover with "but, yes, I *would* like to." As we climbed the stairs to the second floor, she asked, "When do you think you met Mel?" I mentioned the chauffeur and she laughed, "Oh, no, that was Richie. Everybody gets them mixed up."

Richie! That crazy, gun-toting spook! What was *he* doing in Los Angeles? Naw, it couldn't have been Richie; the chauffeur didn't even say hello. Richie was taller, wasn't he? I'm being tested; maybe this is some kind of trap. I was becoming paranoid as Eve pointed to Mel's attic studio, the same room Kweskin had shown me several months before, and instructed, "Just go up those stairs and to your left. He's waiting for you."

She returned downstairs, leaving me at 5 AM on that Final Stairway with some kind of supreme being or supreme bastard just a few feet away, "waiting for me," she said, that bird-crouching, mind-fucking creature of attics, caves and lofts, waiting and listening to my footsteps—and me without any shoes! I recalled something from the introduction to his *Autobiography:*

". . . the battle only really begins when man has finally, through exhaustion, worn out every tangible means, devoured everything in sight and arrived right back where he started with an empty belly and a world with no food, having cried all of his tears and standing completely naked and alone knowing full well that there is no comfort outside of himself, that he must walk that lonesome valley BY himself with no kind words, no friendly faces, no helping hands . . ."

I truly don't remember his first words, I was so startled by what I saw. It was something like "hello" or "so you must be . . ." something friendly and ordinary—but I remember that most certain feeling that this figure could not possibly be Mel Lyman. Indeed, he resembled remarkably a thin, not unpleasant hair-lipped fellow

I had known in junior high school. That was my first thought: they'd fished this guy out of my past. And he did look and sound exactly like a post-operative hairlip. He did not appear like his photographs in any way. He seemed at least 10 to 15 years older, his face was sunken, his tiny eyes hopelessly committed to long-wrinkled sockets; his jaw jutted forth like a cartoon farmer's. He stood, slightly hunched, in a dull blue sport shirt, his hands buried in the rear pockets of his pegged and cuffed gray-plaid pants. His voice, although nasal, was quite warm and down-home; and I suddenly was aware of a feeling I'm sure many must have the first time they see him. I felt sorry for him—not in any indulgent, bleeding way, but in the way one feels sorry for an underdog.

He showed me his room, his recording equipment, his records, his earthquake-proof Hank Williams collection; things seemed hardly to have changed at all since the visit with Kweskin. Mel seated himself at one end of a couch and, without any real provocation, began describing his personal past in the most extreme detail, reading from *Mirror at the End of the Road*, elaborating, reminiscing about his travels, his poverty, early bum days down and out in the Bowery—"I thought, am I gonna spend the rest of my life debating how to spend my last 50¢? I bought a quart of beer, lay down on a doorstep and fell asleep"—reminiscing about friends and lovers, Sophie, Jessie, Eben and most of all, Judy Silver.

"God, I really loved that girl," said Mel, picking up a copy of the book he dedicated to her. "She left me in July of '63. That's when I joined the Jug Band. I didn't want to be a professional musician, but I had to join or the judge would have thrown me in jail for dope.

"She went back out to Kansas, and her parents put her in the nut house." Mel spoke with a trace of bitterness. "Her parents were Jews and they were trying to burn me out of her soul. They actually burned the clothes I gave her. You can imagine how they must have felt. They were just Witchita, Kansas, Jews who made their money in the junk business.'

Mel sat back and drew his feet up on the couch. I noticed he

was wearing shoes, black slip-ons. "I met her in New York. I was playing music at a party, Christmas Day, 1962, and she was there. She was down from Brandeis. It was the music she fell in love with. I could see it really weave a spell, it made her almost glow, you know? She said she fell in love with me, but she really fell in love with the music. She fell in love with my purpose rather than my person. Now, of course, there's really no line between my purpose and my person."

I asked Mel about the religious experience he had playing "Rock of Ages" at Newport '65. "I wanted to save the world with music," he said in mild self-parody. "I still do, but I was more naive at that time. Newport was the last time I played with the Jug Band. I hated the Jug Band. Here I was playing great music, really great music, and they were playing—I don't know what it was—I always call it rinkydink music.

"Anyway, that Sunday I played 'Rock of Ages' and it was awful. In the first place I didn't want to do it. The musicians were not giving the people what they wanted; the people were hungry, and the musicians were just shitting around, just being selfish. And then I wasn't well-known, the audience didn't know me, it was like stepping up there without your clothes on, you know?

"But I kept having this fucking recurring image in my sleep, of playing 'Rock of Ages.' Every night I'd toss around in bed, I'd say, 'Don't make me do it. Don't make me do it.' Finally I said, 'OK, if it's gotta be done, I'll do it.' Then I could sleep again."

To further explain the crisis he must have been going through, Mel went into a short, informal discussion on the relief one feels after finally accepting responsibility.

"So Sunday night came along, and everybody went up there and did their trick," continued Mel. "Finally Dylan got up there, and frankly, I've never seen him worse. He was just selfish, that's all. The people wanted folk music and he wanted rock and roll. After I saw that, I knew I was gonna have to play."

When Mel asked if he could play the hymn for the people as they were leaving, the festival directors, including Pete Seeger,

started citing curfew laws. "I was kinda insistent, I guess. I told them, 'Look, I'm gonna do it whether you like it or not; why don't you make it easy on me.' I was shaking in my boots.

"The finale was really ghastly, all those people singing 'We Shall Overcome,' but they didn't mean it. The people just looked like funny little robots. Then I played 'Rock of Ages.' The people heard it as they were leaving, but it was more for the musicians than the people. The musicians were spellbound. They were *hearing* what they should've been *doing.* Some of the musicians were crying—I was told that later.

"I must've lost ten pounds during that song. The sweat was just pouring down. The spirit was so strong I could barely get it out—you know, the harmonica, that's a pretty tiny hole for all that spirit to go through, that little tiny reed."

"Were you still shaking in your boots?"

"Well no, not once I started," said Mel. For some reason the thought caused him to laugh vehemently in a rather peculiar fashion. In his laughter he sounded very much like those persons—you've heard them—who laugh as though they were given only one laugh for their entire life, so that as soon as they let it *out*, they must reel it back *in* again for future use—an asthmatic, backward sound: "ha ha ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk*," the kind of laugh one associates with shared secrets and, occasionally, nakedness and drool.

Only in Mel's case he seemed to reel in a lot more than he let out, roughly about three backwards to every one forward: "ha ha ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk, yuk yuk yuk yuk, yuk yuk yuk yuk.*" Mingled with his words, it had a vaguely disconcerting effect.

"You're only afraid," he laughed, "*before* the crucifixion, ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk.* No sense in being afraid after the nails are driven in, ha ha ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk, yuk yuk yuk yuk, yuk yuk yuk yuk.*"

Disconcerting because I still had doubts about the identity of this man, and the laughter only confused me more. It was completely alien to what I considered a set of fairly sensible preconceptions

I had nutured over the past months. Was this Mel Lyman or some terminal junkie they had bailed out of the deformity ward at County General, shipped back to Boston and locked in the vault for two weeks with a copy of *Mirror at the End of the Road*—all for the purpose of my visit?

On the other hand, his laughter was so like that of the other vets—particularly George's and Richie's—it implied a long-standing relationship of power and influence. As George said, there's no such thing as coincidence. But these indulgent qualms would have to wait. Ostensibly Melvin was continuing his story.

"From Newport I went straight to Woodstock, hitched a ride with Maria Muldaur's ex-husband. That's in the book, remember the part about the cave? I thought I would live in this cave for a while, just be a holy man and live with God. But once again I realized I belonged to the people, because I was such a great instrument, you see? So I returned to the people, and after that there was such great music, incredible music, for two months. That music had been stored up in me for so long.

"And I started teaching. I used to teach astrology, macrobiotics, yoga, the *I Ching*. I had a course for everybody, *yuk yuk yuk yuk*."

"Was there a community forming around you at that time?"

"I've always had some kind of community with me," said Mel. "Communities were always forming around me—in Oregon, in North Carolina. I'm like a seed. Drop me somewhere and I'll grow a community, ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk*."

Mel paused for a moment and sensed he was needed by the community downstairs. "You know, we're on a night schedule here," he explained, "and I think it's just about time for dinner." Sure enough, it was getting quite light outside the attic windows. "But before we go to dinner, there's something I want to show you."

He took me to a large closet off the entrance hall downstairs. "Come inside and we'll close the door," he said. "I really like the smell in here." The closet was lined with cedar, another of the many patrician comforts in this fascinating mansion. But this was

more than a closet, I soon realized, it was a shrine. We were surrounded by the most important relics of Mel's private past, mostly letters and photographs. Collected, boxed and filed in order on the many shelves were hundreds and hundreds of letters, nearly every letter he ever received or ever sent, the latter returned from friends at his request.

"My past is very important to me," explained Mel, opening up a cardboard box jammed with snapshots. "It's all material for creation." He withdrew a handful and started rummaging through them. "There's me and Judy the night we met, at that party in New York. Says the whole thing, doesn't it? Look at her face: you can tell she's in love with me." He picked up another stack. I recognized many of the pictures from the *Mirror* book; they included not only people but objects and the insides of empty rooms.

"There's our little dresser, there's my coat," he continued. "Here's a picture of me and the Jug Band when we were on *The Steve Allen Show.* There's Johnny Carson giving me a hard time. There I am giving Johnny Carson a hard time. There's Judy and me in a restaurant we used to eat at. There's her parents, before they took her off to the nut house."

I asked Mel what made her come apart. "Those fucking bastards over at IFIF gave her acid," he said bitterly. "I told her not to take it. I knew her head couldn't take it."

Mel closed the box and replaced it on the shelf. "Right after the Lisa Kindred session I went back out to Kansas and saw her for the last time. She was about to marry this guy, I stayed with him as a matter of fact. I remember her asking me, 'What do you want from me?' I said, 'Everything.' She said, 'I *thought* you were gonna say that.' "

We returned to the entrance hall, Mel shut off the closet light and closed the door. "I realized on that last trip out there that a man can't get everything from a woman; a man can't use a woman as an excuse for finding himself." He stared ahead and smiled. "What I wanted was to marry her. If I had, right now I'd be running a little bookstore in Denver."

I could hear the new day's first traffic trickling down the winding tributaries of the Hollywood Hills. Throughout the city paperboys and streetsweepers were processing the news. And here in the Eastman Mansion dinner was being served, a Chinese dish that included bean curds, mushrooms, noodles, stringy green stuff and maybe meat. The dinner was as bizarre as any I'd eaten with these people, not so much for the hour, but the hour and the formality. The dining room table was elaborately set with baroque silver and china. Mel sat at the head, of course; the others apparently sat at random. The whole scene was tinted with the oranges of dawn, old chandeliers and dying embers in the dining room fire.

Suddenly the kitchen door swung open and in strode the chauffeur, still wearing his black tuxedo. I'd forgotten about him. Only he wasn't the chauffeur anymore. By removing his cap he'd now become the butler. And by removing his dark glasses he'd now become, quite clearly, Richie. Which made no sense at all. Why would Richie, the Hill's most gifted architect and craftsman, be pulling KP? Another game? Another punishment?

If it was a game, it was played most seriously. He never spoke, never smiled, as he looked after the crumbs and garbage of the others. Nor did he eat; when he wasn't serving or bussing, he stood at rigid attention, his back to the wall, awaiting whatever commands collective whim might produce. In this role he was forced to take abuse without response—a friendly game, perhaps, but I found it hard to swallow.

At one point Richie dropped a fork or something, and Jessie jeered, from the side of her mouth, "This is the noisiest butler we ever had." "Better send him back to the Hill," said someone else, and the whole group began laughing and staring at his stoic face. Then Jessie reached for a cigarette, and instantly, with the reflex precision of a bayonet artist, Richie bent over the table and lit it for her.

By now I was pretty well convinced I was in the presence of the one true Mel. The way he ate, for one thing. It's not that common to see a 33-year-old man gumming his food. I had noticed

his lack of teeth earlier—it accounted for the hair-lip appearance—but assumed he would snap false ones in for eating.

More convincing was the respect he received from the others. His voice was never raised, never arrogant, and never ungentle. Yet his every request was fulfilled, his every question answered, with almost fearful dispatch. On the way to dinner Mel had wanted to quote me something from *Mirror at the End of the Road.* A copy was not at hand, so he suggested to one of his followers, quite casually, "There should be a copy of the book in every room." By the time we sat down, there was.

And now Mel was questioning George. "I understand you played the 'Colors' tape last night."

"Yes," replied George from the other end of the table.

"You know," said Mel, "that's a stereo tape. Did you turn the thing to stereo?"

"I did, yes."

Mel patted his mouth with a linen napkin. "The left channel is weak, you know. Did you remember to boost it on the left?"

The question caught George off guard. There was a tell-tale pause and people stopped eating. "I . . . I'm not sure," he stammered, "I *think* so."

"Was my voice in the center?" Mel asked.

"Oh yes, sure," said George, relieved. This seemed to satisfy Mel; he nodded and the sound of forks and plates continued.

There were long silences. Things got so quiet near the end of the main course I could hear short rumblings from the stomach inside the girl to my right.

Then David Gude piped up from across the table. He was addressing me. "Did you ever get your tape recorder fixed?"

"It was never broken," I said. "I figured I better use a sturdy model if I was dealing with dangerous types such as yourself." He smiled a hard kind of smile, exposing that black gap in his upper teeth. So much for small talk. After another 45 minutes Mel put his napkin down, stood up, said nothing and left. One by one the others did the same.

Later I asked Mel about the silences. "We're all so united internally," he said, "there's no point in talking—unless, you know, something specific has to be discussed or a decision has to be made. Of course, it's not always like this morning. Some nights we joke a lot. I mean, I do crazy, crazy things. Some nights we'll talk in different accents, for example. Lately, I've been telling stories a lot."

Such internal unity, I said, was hard for an outsider to understand. In the silences there seemed to be such emptiness and sadness.

"Not emptiness," Mel corrected. "But much sadness, much sadness. To express sadness is joy. Nothing is more joyful." He looked at me as if explaining the obvious. "That's what great music is all about."

We were sitting at a wrought iron patio table near the newly installed pool and sauna bath. Mel leaned forward and slowly rubbed his mouth, a nervous habit he may have developed after having his teeth removed. "You know, the people in Los Angeles have been together the longest," he explained. "Every community has its identity, its own purpose. Boston is sort of like a boot camp, you know? A tough boot camp, only about half the people make it through. Then New York, of course, is the business; it's a business city and that's where we handle the business end of things. There's the star business, John Kostick's stars, it's getting bigger all the time. And they make furniture there, plus some people have jobs working on other houses—they get $10 an hour, every one of them.

"Then there's the farm in Kansas. Did they tell you about that?" For the first time Mel started speaking seriously about the future, and there was a shade of compassion in his voice. "There's all these kids that don't know what to do with themselves. For them life is so abstract, they have no values. They need to go out in the woods and rediscover life. Many of them, in fact, have tried that; but they had no plan, and after a couple years they had nothing left, there was no life after that.

"This has been on my mind for years. If I can set up a place, a basic step where people who don't know *nothin'* can go, that

would be *real* basic training. Fort Hill is something like that, but for many of these kids it's still too structured, still too much in the city, you know? The farm will be ideal, plus the place will grow food for all the other communities."

It sounded like a master plan. The established communities, all located in cities famous for drawing transient young seekers, would serve as recruiting stations for the farm; in turn, the farm would supply food, plus new soldiers, for work in the cities.

"These new people need a whole new world," said Mel. "It's understandable; the old one has served its purpose and they've got to create a brand new one. This is a whole new culture. We're really starting a new country."

I asked him the purpose of the West Coast communities.

"Well, San Francisco is still too formative to tell," said Mel. "I mean, I go someplace 'cause I feel the need. I don't stop and ask why. The hardest one to define is Los Angeles. It's the creative center of the whole works, Los Angeles, really the creative center for the whole world. This is the home of the creators, the city has a pulse, a dynamic soul. It's hardly ever exposed, of course, mainly in the films of the Thirties and Forties. I'll probably do all my music and films here. We're gonna do some great films.

"You know, we laid out the book in this house. Would you like to see where?" With that, Mel stood up and took me inside to the library where *Mirror at the End of the Road* was pasted up, then to the basement darkroom where the book's photos were printed and the backyard toolshed where Eben Given worked on the drawings. Next to the toolshed was a volley ball court that Mel was having converted to a regulation-sized basketball half court. To the Lyman people, for some reason, playing basketball is almost as important as watching football.

As we continued strolling around the mansion's several acres, Mel explained how he was able to locate and finance such regal property at only $16,000 down. "It takes a lot of faith," he said. "People have faith in me and I have faith in God, ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk*." A short time later he said, "You know,

my faith is not a blind one. I've been living on faith so long, I'm pretty good at it."

Good enough, apparently, to make some plans. Mel pointed out certain areas of the land he planned to change. A shady section near the pool would become a fishpond, a steep portion of the hill below would support more houses. "Richie will design 'em and hang 'em off the side. We got lots of geniuses here. We got somebody who can do anything."

Richie was certainly one of those geniuses, I thought, as we returned to the patio and passed by his most recent creation, an all-redwood sauna bath that blended perfectly with the surrounding trees and included tricky wooden latches. Richie now earns $100 a day designing similar saunas for upper-crusty clients throughout Los Angeles. So what the fuck's he doing slinging hash in a tux at six in the morning? It seemed pointless to ask.

During our walk I noticed no other people on the grounds; apparently they were inside, finishing their morning chores before retiring to bed. Why, exactly, was everyone on a night schedule? I asked Mel.

"I'm like the tides," he said casually. "My schedule seems to creep back an hour earlier each day—like the tides." Yes, that would be like the tides, I thought; it all made perfect sense. Thus, two weeks from now the Los Angeles community would be operating on a day schedule, gradually returning to a night schedule two weeks later, at the end of Mel's period. Like so many of Mel's programs, it not only provided a logical order for the community to follow, but heightened the separation between the community and the world outside. While most of Los Angeles lived, unquestioning, by the sun, the Lyman Family lived by the moon.

As we sat down at the patio table, George appeared and began shooting pictures of Mel. Mel feigned annoyance. "Dammit, George, if you're going to take pictures of me, the least you can do is get me my teeth." George giggled and scurried inside.

It seemed like a good time to find out about the Magic Theater. Mel hesitated for a moment, then let out a deep sigh. "Let's see

if I can explain it—that's a hard one.

"Before I tore it down, I was going to use it as a place to show my films to the world, to play my music. It would have been like a church. Rather than go out into the world, I was going to bring the world to me. It would really have been super LSD; people would've gone in one door and come out eight hours later completely transformed!

"Then after Jim Kweskin started recording his last album, I realized there were existing channels that could do the job better than my personal theater."

Mel paused and stared ahead. I waited for him to go on, but he just kept staring. Finally he raised his eyebrows as if to say "next question." But surely there was more to this one. What about Bob McQuaid? I heard he had been mistreated or something.

Again Mel paused; he seemed to choose his words carefully. "Well, you know, there's the vault, you heard about that. And you heard the story about how Paul stole the car and they put him in the vault so he could see himself. Well, the same sort of thing happened to McQuaid. They put him in the vault, and then they got so involved in building the theater, they completely forgot about him and why he was there."

"I heard they neglected the human element or something."

"That's right."

"You mean, they mistreated him? Or . . ."

"He broke out. The people were so into the theater, he got out and they didn't even realize it. That's when I decided the theater had to be torn down. In a way, you see, Bob McQuaid served a great purpose."

So that's what Richie meant by neglecting "the people they lived with." But Mel had a further revelation.

"On that very same day," he recalled, "Jim called me from Los Angeles. See, Richie was in charge of the theater, but he also was supposed to be on Jim's album. Jim called up and said, 'I need Richie.' I told him, 'Richie can't come right now; he's got a theater to tear down.' So Jim said, 'Well, why don't you come, *you* be

on the album?' You see how it all worked out? Me making the decision to tear down the Magic Theater left me free to work on Jim's album."

So that's what George meant by "organic development."

"In Los Angeles," said Mel, "I realized—shit, the whole world could be a Magic Theater. It's already set up—everybody has a TV set. Now the idea of the original Magic Theater seems so small." He sighed again. "But it served its purpose."

Just then George returned holding a wadded up towel which he unwadded on the table, revealing a shiny pink object, Mel's teeth. Mel put them in his mouth, then pulled them out as fast. "Yeckkkk!" he shuddered, "Didn't Eve rinse these off before she gave them to you? Did she just give them to you?"

"Yeah, uh, I guess so," answered George.

"Take 'em back and rinse 'em off. They've been soaking in that stuff all night. I hate the taste of that shit."

George picked up the teeth and flew inside the house. I asked Mel if persons joining the community didn't object to giving up their personal freedom.

"You give up what you might have *thought* was personal freedom," he said. "But there's more freedom here than most places, an internal freedom. People here don't have concepts. They live in the moment here more than anywhere I know."

"What role did acid play in this evolution?"

"We use acid on occasion, but not so much anymore. For one thing, acid ain't what it used to be. I mean, I can take people through changes of consciousness without acid. Those silences you mentioned. If you were to go through some of those, enough of those, it would probably have the same effect on you as if you took acid."

Mel smiled and shrugged. "I never gave it to people who didn't want it. People came to me and asked. And I don't think I ever gave acid to anyone who hadn't had it before.

"You know, people take acid for different reasons. Jimmie used to take it a lot just to groove, just to enjoy himself. So one day

I gave him a couple thousand mikes. He didn't groove. He just stared at himself, and he didn't like a lot of the things he saw. You see all the tricks you do, you see all the defenses, all the tricks you've worked up to avoid pain. In other words, he saw what I saw in him."

"I heard you filmed one of his trips where he actually changed his sign. Is that possible?"

"He became more of a Cancer, Jim's a Cancer with a Capricorn moon. In the Jug Band he was always more of a Capricorn, he lived more on the surface. He wasn't aware of that soft Cancer soul. In other words he became more true to himself."

George arrived with the freshly rinsed teeth. Mel took them, eyed them suspiciously, gingerly tasted them. "You're gonna see me lose 18 years right now," he said, inserting the solid pink plastic plate, adjusting it with his hand over his mouth, then withdrawing his hand.

I guess that's what happened. I guess he lost 18 years. That, or maybe he cast a spell, whammied me with his eyes, dropped acid in my bean curds or did some sleight-of-hand trick with a mask made of rubber unknown on this planet. I was looking at a brand new, entirely different face, one in its 20s, very similar to the photos I'd seen of Mel Lyman but fresh and friendly, more friendly, in fact, than even the pictures George was taking later portrayed.

Probably any dentist could explain this incredible transformation. But could he explain the way Mel's head snapped back or the laugh that boomed from that new magic mouth after I expressed my bewilderment? It was a hearty laugh that had no yuk-yuks.

It left me with a relaxed feeling I'm sure others have felt in his presence, the feeling of having one's doubts washed away. This was truly Mel Lyman.

He joked about his teeth, took them out, put them in upside down for a weird horse effect, and finally, as George finished shooting, took them out again. Mel complained they hurt his mouth;

he said he only wore them during the increasingly rare occasions he was in public.

Which led us to the subject of Richard Herbruck. Mel brought it up. "I understand you don't believe there's a Richard Herbruck," he said. I nodded. "Well, there is. He's very much alive." Mel then explained the whole routine, unfortunately off the record. That was the deal. However, I can say that my original doubts, particularly those raised by Jessie Benton and the people at Pacific High Recorders, were confirmed. But there's a funnier and weirder twist to it all which Lyman promised to reveal soon, when Richard Herbruck presents . . . himself!

Not that any of it is very important, except that Herbruck's name did get kicked around a lot during the KPFK thing. Mel dismissed that episode rather good-naturedly, I thought. "It was all done in innocence, all done in anger," he said. What effect would the fear and bad publicity have on further efforts to infiltrate media? "All publicity is good publicity; I don't care what kind of publicity it is, it helps. After all, it doesn't hurt people to fear."

It's true, Mel does get you to think about things in a different way. "I understand you recently got a letter from Charles Manson," I said.

"Yeah, you want to see it?" He disappeared inside the house for a minute, then returned with a small piece of light blue stationery which he handed me, waiting for me to read it. In the letter, apparently dictated from jail to some of his women, Manson pledges servitude to Mel Lyman and asks his help in breaking out of prison. Mel's response was to send a copy of *Mirror at the End of the Road*, which he said was confiscated by the jailers, plus a letter.

"His letter made me very sad," said Mel, " 'cause he's so close and so far away. He came so close to the truth, he came so close to really being a compassionate man. I just wanted to get hold of him and kick him that one step further. I told him in my letter things like, 'I'd like to meet you someday,' 'you have to trust me,' that sort of thing."

Mel looked up from the letter, "You know, I don't think he was guilty. I don't think he was there at the murders."

"It makes no difference to the law whether he was actually there or not," I said.

"But I don't think he was *guilty.* He couldn't consciously tell his followers to do that and still know what he does. He was guilty of being a bad leader, that's all."

But didn't Mel once claim he was Christ and Manson was the anti-Christ?

"I might've said that," admitted Mel, "but actually he's more like John the Baptist. I mean, I say a lot of things for the sake of communication, and the actual words aren't that important."

Mel shook his head sadly, referring to the letter. "He wants to go out in the desert; he's still fighting his personal battle. They're X-ing themselves out of the world, you know? I'm just the opposite. I'm X-ing myself *into* the world."

From around a corner of the mansion, one of Mel's women came bearing a huge bowl of multicolored ice cream. She placed it in front of him, gave him a spoon and left, saying nothing.

"I can't say that people who have money are bad," Mel continued. "I can't find the bad people. Everybody's scrubbing with the wrong soap all the time. Recently I rode on a plane with a gay banker; I couldn't find anything wrong with him. On my last trip to New York I met a Japanese banker, we talked for hours, talked about economics.

"I mean, I've lived all levels of life. I used to have a saying: Christ is where you find Him. I can love or hate anyone, ha ha, *yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk.*"

The soap remark was a bit mystifying, but the rest made sense. Still, it seemed at odds with what I'd heard about Mel's racism.

"I certainly don't pretend all races are the same," he explained. "Ever since I was a kid I've had trouble with Jews. But I also believe a man of any nationality can rise above that nationality, can put that nationality to use. Take Jimmie Kweskin, for example—Jimmie the Jew we sometimes call him. I use him in the way

his Jewishness will be most effective; I use his business sense. That's why he's business manager. I acknowledge that characteristic and put it to work."

Mel beamed confidently at the thought of having harnessed a natural resource. "I like to talk in topical languages 'cause people can get into it. Like I might say something like, 'all niggers are stupid,' you know? Just to wake people up, get them involved."

I mentioned his writings about hippies. "With hippies I come on very strong," said Mel, " 'cause it takes that to reach them. I mean, hippies are very strong, most of 'em, and it takes strong language to reach them."

What sort of trouble had he had with Jews? Mel shook his head. "I've fought so many Jewish parents . . . the way they hold on to their kids, you know? It's rare that parents approve of me anyway. I almost never get along with parents. It's all the same battle. Kay Boyle—I wanted her kids and she wanted them. Eventually, I won.

"One of the few parents who has understood me is Thomas Hart Benton, and that's because he's an artist, a creator. He creates in the medium of art, and I create in the medium of people."

The medium of people. It seemed such an incongruous phrase to be coming from this mild, toothless fellow. Could he really pull it off? Who was this man? Even though it was really just a matter of semantics, the Big Dumb Question, I felt, could no longer be avoided. Was he God?

Mel's face was blank. "No."

But you're not like the others, I said.

He smiled. "No. I mean, people have been saying Mel Lyman is God for a long time, and I don't know what they mean. I don't know what they mean by the word God. Some people's concept of God is so small, I'm much more than that. So I guess to them I would be God."

"But didn't you say you were God?"

"I doubt it. I might have said it, you know, *metaphorically.* I wrote a letter, a great letter, it's gonna be in my next book, which

sort of explains all this. It's a letter to God; so, you know, how could I be God?" Mel's face brightened as he considered the riddle. "But I can tell you I know God better than anybody in the world."

"Are you more than human?"

"Man, there isn't anything more than human. Human is limitless."

"But you did say you were Jesus Christ."

"Jesus Christ is such a small word. I mean, I'm doing the same thing as he did. I'm the same instrument in a different time." He was getting evasive.

"But Christ said he was God, the son of God, God on earth."

Mel snickered. "So they *said* he said."

"But that's not what you are?"

Turning away, Mel surveyed the pool and beyond, the front lawn, the wall of trees, the entire Los Angeles basin. "It's a hard question," he said. "All I can tell you is I'm His best instrument on earth. And that kind of includes all those other things."

He looked down at his hands for a moment, then impishly raised his eyes and look at me from the corner of them. "I'm Superman. Maybe that's what I am. When I was a little kid I always dressed up as Superman; I was always dressing up as Superman and flying off somewhere, you know? Even when I was in my early 20s, up in Oregon, I got drunk one night and dressed up as Superman. I tried to attack a cop, I remember."

When we were talking about Manson, I had a question to ask, then lost it. Attacking a cop brought it back. The question of violence. Most people are raised pretty non-violently, I said, and things like the KPFK incident, therefore, are completely foreign to their thinking. Was this obstacle to accepting the Lyman Family really necessary?

"Most people who are non-violent don't even know what violence is," said Mel. "I think people cheat themselves out of a lot of wonderful experiences. And after all, the way you grow is through experience."

Yes, I argued, but you can't have a society with people hurting

each other for the sake of their own experience.

"Sometimes you have to take that chance. I'm *glad* I tried to attack that cop."

Mel shrugged. "We haven't *killed* anyone."

OK, I said, but then you have Kweskin going around saying, "We haven't killed anyone—*yet.*" What's that supposed to mean?

He turned back to the pool and started drumming his lips with his fingers. At first he spoke almost to himself. "Let me see if I've killed anybody yet . . . my mind must be getting tired . . . it's getting late." He rubbed his eyes.

"I know I've been *mad* enough to kill sometimes. I remember one time this cat made me so mad—and you know how much I love cats, right?—I wanted to smash that cat, smash it on the floor, again and again. I picked it up like this, you know?" He raised an arm over his head and assumed a menacing stance. "Then suddenly all the energy just drained out of my arm and I laid the cat back down on the floor." His arm floated back down to his side.

"I found there *is* an internal break of some kind that prevented me from killing that cat," said Mel. "But I wouldn't have found it out if I hadn't tried it, see what I mean?"

The parable had a kicker. "I suppose you could say God prevented me from killing that cat. But if you want to know for sure, better get your own cat and try it yourself."

It was getting late, nearly 11 AM. Mel said he wanted to take a sauna bath and a swim before going to bed. Which prompted a final question. Considering the importance he placed on need, *necessity*, was it really necessary for him to live in such luxury?

"The question has never come up, really," he said. "But I do have to take care of my body. I need to swim every day, to take a sauna bath every day."

"But you *are* quite a materialist, according to your book. You value your possessions highly."

"Oh yes, yes," admitted Mel with a smile. "The world is full of things. Some of them are people and some of them are chairs."

I went inside and used the kitchen phone to reserve a plane back to San Francisco. Near the phone was a handmade chart, "Ye Olde Shower Roster," on which the time and date of every shower taken by members of the household were registered. It was good to know that life with the Lyman Family was proceeding in a clean and orderly fashion. A couple of women were performing odd chores about the kitchen, perhaps getting things ready for that evening's breakfast. In the basement darkroom, George was already developing the pictures he'd taken that morning.

While outside, alone in his shiny new pool, Mel Lyman, healthy and confident in this his 33rd year, was treading water.



Epilogue

On December 8th, 1971, Mel Lyman sent the following letter to his fourth grade teacher, Dixie Duke, in Santa Rosa:

Dear Mrs. Duke:

Received your warm and friendly letter this morning. I thought I'd better write and warn you about the ROLLING STONE article before you got the wrong impression. The first installment just came out and the second installment will be in the next issue. This is the one that will probably contain parts of your conversation with David Felton. The first one is mainly negative, made up mostly of interviews with people who don't like me. They've used me to glorify themselves and completely distorted all the facts, they've even changed history to make me look bad and themselves good. I'm not complaining, mind you, I'm just pointing out that most of the things said about me and my communities are untrue; I'm used to being misinterpreted. I've made a lot of enemies over the last ten years and they get in a dig every chance they get. Still, it's good publicity. I sound like a very exciting character, kind of a modern day John Dillinger. The next issue will hopefully be a little closer to the truth as the people interviewed are not necessarily hostile towards me and also this coming issue will contain a direct interview with me and at least I will be represented by my own words. There are a lot of things you aren't going to be able to understand about me, my religious convictions, etc., but it is all just language anyhow and words are never as important as personal evaluation.

Received your lecture about the merits of profanity. I had to laugh. I, too, wished there weren't so many dirty words in the book but you have to remember that the book is made up entirely of letters I wrote

in my youth and I couldn't tidy it up now just because I'm a little older and wiser. It was an accurate history of growing pains. And for my obsession with bodily excrements I can only plead guilty, in some ways I'm afraid I will always be a vulgar little man. But again, to me it's only language, I use the words that best communicate the thought or feeling; can you think of a better way to say, "aw, shit!"

It seems you were put off a little by my trials and tribulations in the book, and the worst parts were left out because I was even too miserable to write letters. But . . . that is one of the reasons I put the book out; to show that the human spirit cannot be defeated and that adversity only **strengthens** a man's character; it grinds out the littleness in him, it **deepens** him. . . . And that is why so many young people come to me for guidance, because they know I can understand **their** problems. So rest assured that I haven't lost any of my appreciation for the beauty of the world, spending so much time in the ugliness only served to distinguish beauty by the **lack** of it. . . . And the weaker souls among us need encouragement. A lot of people just don't have it in them to get up after they've been knocked down. And those of us who have that kind of strength must share it . . . over the years I have learned how to build, I have learned how to start at home with the people around me and that is the basis of my communities. I remember when you made me play baseball against my will because I was afraid I would fail. I remember when I was afraid of a bully and you said if it was you you would go out and lick him. We had a community and you were the leader, and now I am the leader of my own community. Life is really very simple, it is only the attempts to communicate it that make it seem complex. Well I guess I'm giving you a schoolboy lecture but it's nice to know that I've learned something, isn't it. Write me again after you've read the two issues of ROLLING STONE and tell me if you still like me. . . .

Love, Mel



Henry Poirot is the young Bay Area sales manager for Ballantine Books, the company distributing *Mirror at the End of the Road.* On Saturday, November 13th, he met with George Peper and Owen deLong, and this is his account of what occurred:

"The way it happened was George and Owen looked me up, you know, to persuade me to push Mel's book harder. They struck me as very . . . *intense* people. Right off, they wanted to do my chart. Anyway, one thing led to another, and the three of us got together on a Saturday morning to play basketball. Afterwards, we went up to their house on Buena Vista for a coke, and they asked me what I thought of Mel's book. Well, I'm used to talking straight with people, and I thought we were on a friendly basis, so I told them in effect that I didn't think it was worth shit, although I'd promoted it to book store owners more than I ordinarily push a single book. I mean, I'd written a promo release on my own and so forth, but I told them that the book seemed rather absurd to me. I mean, so Mel went through a bum trip and suffered for a few years, right? Well, what the fuck, we all did that, right? I don't set myself up as any critic, but I can read, I'm as literate as the next guy, and I found the book wanting—nothing personal, just a critical opinion.

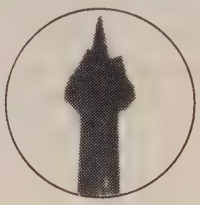
"Well, right away when they caught the drift of what I was saying, George and Owen began to insult me, call me names. They said I was lazy and accused me of wanting a free ride, a cheap ride. Then, abruptly, very, very quickly, George kicked me in the face. My glasses flew off somewhere, and I was groping around on the floor trying to find them, and George jumped on top of me and grabbed my shirt collar and kept yelling insults at me. I was very disoriented, everything had happened so suddenly, and the thought entered my mind that they might *crucify* me. I mean, I was aware of the parallels between the Manson people and Lyman's people, and I just didn't know what they might do.

"Ordinarily, I'm the kind of guy who when somebody kicks me in the face, I'll try to kick him in the balls, but I didn't pursue it physically in this instance because they had me outnumbered, and I truly didn't know what they were capable of doing to me. Anyway, I gathered myself together and left. I mean, George was always talking to me about 'feelings,' and I never knew what he *meant.*

"Anyway, George called me early that evening. He pointedly refused to apologize, and when I made some reference to his attacking me, he said something like, 'It happened, that's the way things are. Now let's get on with business.'

"When George kicked me and jumped on me, I really did think of crucifixion. I looked at George's eyes and I could see a total lack of control. One minute we were talking, I thought reasonably, and the next—whammo!—George came at me like out of a catapult.

"Well, we're still on business terms, but we don't play basketball on Saturday mornings anymore."



About the Authors

David Felton, Associate Editor of *Rolling Stone,* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for his expose of the internal affairs division of the L.A. Police Force and was a member of the Pulitzer-winning *LA Times* staff that covered the Watts rebellion. He also won the 1965 Catholic Press Council Award and, along with David Dalton, the Columbia Journalism Prize for 'Year of the Fork, Night of the Hunter,' which originally appeared in *Rolling Stone.*

David Dalton is a freelance writer who has been writing about rock and rock-related subjects for many years. He is the author/editor of recently published works on Janis Joplin and the Rolling Stones, contributing editor to *Rolling Stone,* and is currently working on a book with the Marvel Comics people to be entitled *The Creation and Destruction of the Universe.*

Robin Green has worked as a freelance writer and was assistant to the editor at Marvel Comics. Presently a staff writer for *Rolling Stone,* she has written articles on Dennis Hopper. Black Sabbath and was author of the story which accompanied the celebrated David Cassidy centerfold.

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"To humiliate and control"

"Lyman is a threat; but he is also the symptom of a far greater disease, the hushing up and blatant sidestepping by heads of a frank discussion of all the terrifying aspects of dropping acid. Many of Lyman's followers are like thousands of us who have experienced the profoundest anxieties, loneliness, and fear while tripping. But when searching around for someone with whom to communicate the gripping paranoia of those fears, found only silence, smugness, and pretended ignorance. So they found Mel, who did speak the truth about it, but who took that truth and those fears, and twisted them and used them to humiliate and control.

Fascist communities like Fort Hill are bound to spread and the power of the Mansons and Lymans among us to strengthen, just as long as people continue searching their fears, on acid or straight, and no one else is there to talk to them straight and direct and sympathetically about it."

—from a letter to the editors of **Rolling Stone**

A new kind of fascism has emerged in the wake of the so-called acid revolution. Born of boredom, loneliness and intense spiritual hunger, it has captured some of America's most creative young minds. In a period of extreme personal liberation, it has caused more and more believers to opt for servility, to let their lives—their careers, pleasures, loyalties, even choice of lovers—be controlled by the holy whim of one man.

This book draws no conclusions as to the causes and size of the phenomenon; the acid revolution is still too young to place in perspective. But the similarities between these believers, and between them and us, raise some very real questions and fears about the future: that something dark may indeed lurk beyond the Aquarian Age.

As Mel Lyman wrote in his *Plea for Courage:*

"We've got to stop fighting each other and fight the common enemy. We've got to get all these little communities that are forming all over the country into one **Big Community.**"

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